The Promethean Library



The Greek Commonplace Book

A Line for Every Day of the Year

Homer · Plato · Sophocles · Epictetus
and nineteen more

366 passages in the words of their classic translators

Readers · No. 2

The Greek Commonplace Book



A Daybook

The Greek Commonplace Book

A Line for Every Day of the Year

366 short passages from twenty-three Greek writers, one for every day of the year, quoted word for word

With a note for every day, an index of authors and a guide to the sources



The Promethean Library · Readers · No. 2
Transatlantic Press

The Greek Commonplace Book
A Line for Every Day of the Year

The Promethean Library · Readers · No. 2
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The readings. The readings are reproduced word for word from public domain translations. Each translator, edition and date is listed under Sources of the Texts, with what this edition leaves out.

How this edition was made. The introduction, headnotes, questions, reflections, practices, notes, glossary, chronology and reading list were drafted with the help of artificial intelligence and checked by hand against the readings and against published sources. Every quotation in them matches the readings printed in this book word for word, and every fact was checked against a published source before it was printed. The publisher keeps a record of the source checked for each fact. No quotation, fact or story was invented. The readings themselves are copied unchanged from the translations named under Sources of the Texts.

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When he was asked what was very difficult, he said, "To know oneself." And what was easy, "To advise another."

Thales, in Diogenes Laertius, Lives of Eminent Philosophers, translated by C. D. Yonge

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Before You Begin

This is a book to keep by the bed or the breakfast table. It holds 366 short passages from the writers of ancient Greece, one for every day of the year, February 29 included. Most can be read in under a minute. Each is followed by a single sentence saying who is speaking and why.

Every passage is quoted word for word from an English translation old enough to be free for anyone to use. Nothing has been modernized, shortened inside a sentence or stitched together from different places. Each reading begins at the start of a sentence and ends at the end of one, so what you read is what the translator printed.

The voices are mixed on purpose. On a single page you may move from Homer to a Stoic teacher, from a historian to a love poet, from a comic dialogue of the dead to a statesman pleading with his city. Twenty-three authors appear, and none of them takes more than about one day in eight.

Most of the translations are Victorian and Edwardian, and they sound like it. Expect *thou* and *thee*, British spellings such as *honour*, Latin names for Greek gods in some versions, and the occasional long sentence. These old voices are part of the pleasure, and the notes explain anything a reader needs to follow a passage.

You do not need to start on January 1. Open the book at today's date and begin there. If a reading strikes you, the Sources of the Texts at the back will tell you where to find the whole work it comes from.

Introduction

A Book of Places

For centuries, careful readers kept a notebook of passages worth remembering, sorted under headings such as love, friendship or death. Such a notebook was called a commonplace book. The name comes from the Latin *locus communis*, a common place, which itself translates a Greek phrase, *topos koinos*. Aristotle used the Greek term in his *Topics* for the stock forms of argument a speaker could turn to, and over time the word came to mean a general truth or a saying of proverbial wisdom, and then the book in which such sayings were gathered.

The habit spread through the schools of Renaissance Europe. Erasmus traveled with a chest of notes and taught students to collect examples from their reading and file them under topics. By the seventeenth century the method was taught at Oxford, and John Locke wrote a short treatise on how to arrange a commonplace book, published in English in 1706. Keepers over the centuries included Leonardo da Vinci, John Milton, Isaac Newton and Thomas Jefferson, and the method remained a popular way of studying until the early twentieth century. A commonplace book was never meant to be read straight through. It was a store to return to, a place where a good sentence could be found again when it was needed.

This book borrows that idea and gives it a calendar. Instead of headings, it has months, and each month gathers passages around a loose theme. The idea is old in another way as well: the Greeks themselves loved the short saying, and much of what we know of them comes to us through people who collected sayings.

The Greek Love of the Short Saying

In Plato's *Protagoras* (reading 16), Socrates tells how the wise men of an earlier age met together and dedicated a few brief inscriptions in the temple of Apollo at Delphi, as the first fruits of their wisdom. The one most often remembered is the shortest: know yourself. It runs through this book like a thread. Diogenes Laertius credits it to Thales (reading 5), and Socrates in the *Phaedrus* says he has no time for anything else until he has obeyed it (reading 23).

Diogenes Laertius, whose *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* supplies more passages here than any other single work, was a collector above all. His lives of the philosophers are crowded with one-line answers, put-downs and bits of advice, many of them from the sages of his first book, among them Thales, Solon, Chilo, Pittacus, Bias and Cleobulus. Livelier still is Diogenes the Cynic, who made his home in a cask he found in a temple and answered questions with jokes that turn out to be lessons. Several of his retorts appear in these pages.

Other writers in this book were collectors too. Plutarch filled his *Lives* and his moral essays with sayings, and in his life of Lykurgus he gathers anecdotes to show the Spartans' dislike of long speeches. A great deal of early Greek poetry survives only because later writers quoted it. Henry Thornton Wharton, whose versions of Sappho are used here, prints each fragment with a note naming the later writer who quoted it. One such writer is Athenaeus, who flourished about 230 A.D. and quoted Sappho's prayer to the goddess of Cyprus to serve nectar in golden cups (reading 144). Some of Sappho's poems now exist as a single line, such as reading 309. In a real sense the Greeks handed down their literature as a commonplace book.

The Voices in This Book

The writers quoted here span roughly a thousand years. They fall into a few broad groups.

The poets. Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, which go back to the early Archaic period of Greece, give the largest share of readings: battle and grief from the first, homecoming and hospitality from the second. Hesiod, a native of Boeotia thought to have lived around 700 BC, gives the advice of his *Works and Days* on labor, neighbors and the seasons, and the April readings lean on him. The Homeric Hymns, short poems addressed to the gods, add praise of the Earth and the hearth. Sappho of Lesbos, who lived from about 630 to about 570 BC, speaks of love and evening and memory. Pindar of Thebes wrote odes for victors in the great athletic games, and his lines on song and fame and the brevity of life are among the grandest here. Theocritus, the first poet of pastoral, and Bion and Moschus, whose poems Andrew Lang printed beside his, write of herdsmen, cicadas and shade.

The playwrights. Aeschylus, the earliest Greek tragic playwright, is represented by his *Agamemnon* and *The Furies* and by *Prometheus Bound*. Sophocles, best known for his plays about Oedipus, appears in six plays. Euripides gives lines on friendship, exile, fortune and the dearness of one's own country.

The historians. Herodotus of Halicarnassus and Thucydides both lived in the fifth century BC. Herodotus tells of the great war between the Greeks and Persia and of the customs of many peoples; Thucydides tells of the long war between Athens and Sparta and gives the speeches of generals and statesmen. Xenophon of Athens, who carried his history of Greece down to 362 BC, is quoted here from his *Memorabilia*, his memories of the conversations of Socrates. Plutarch, who wrote mainly biographies and essays, joins them; his *Lives* are history told through character, and his essays are practical moral advice.

The philosophers and the critics. Plato wrote dialogues in which Socrates questions his friends and opponents; fourteen of his works are drawn on here. His student Aristotle, who lived from 384 to 322 BC, appears with his *Poetics* and his *Politics*. Epictetus, a Stoic teacher who had been a slave in Rome in his youth, speaks plainly about what

is and is not in our power, and the emperor Marcus Aurelius gives a few entries from his *Meditations*. Lucian of Samosata, who lived in the second century AD, adds satire, much of it set among the dead. The critic known as Longinus writes on what makes writing great. Demosthenes, the Athenian orator, urges his city to act against Philip of Macedon before it is too late.

The Shape of the Year

Each month has a theme, set out in a short paragraph at its head. January begins with self-knowledge and beginnings; February is for friendship and love; March for courage; April for work and the seasons; May for nature, beauty and song. June turns to justice and law, July to the city and freedom, August to fortune and change, September to learning and teaching, October to speech and silence, November to grief, death and memory, and December to home and peace of mind.

The themes are loose. A passage on courage may also be about friendship, and a verse about spring may be about death as well. Within a month the readings are not in order of date. They are arranged so that the same author seldom speaks two days running, which keeps the voices changing as they would in a real notebook kept over a lifetime of reading.

The balance between authors is deliberate. No single writer supplies more than about one reading in eight. Homer has the most, then Diogenes Laertius, then Plato; at the other end, Moschus appears twice. Some works already printed in full elsewhere in this series, such as the *Apology*, *Antigone*, *Prometheus Bound* and the *Meditations*, are represented by only a handful of their best-known lines, so that most of these pages offer something new.

The Translators

Every translation used here was published before 1929, and every translator was dead by 1956. Most were Victorian scholars and schoolmasters;

one, William Cullen Bryant, was an American poet and newspaper editor, whose *Iliad* appeared in 1870 and his *Odyssey* in 1871. Benjamin Jowett's Plato was first published in 1871 and revised for a third edition in 1892. C. D. Yonge's Diogenes Laertius appeared in 1853. Richard Crawley's Thucydides was complete in 1874, G. C. Macaulay's Herodotus came out in 1890, and George Long's Epictetus in 1877.

Their methods differ. Some aimed at a close, almost word-for-word English, such as Buckley's prose Euripides, which calls itself literally translated, and Wharton's plain prose versions of Sappho. Others wrote verse of their own: Bryant's blank verse Homer, Storr's Sophocles, Morshead's rhymed choruses for Aeschylus, and Arthur S. Way's long-lined Pindar of 1922. Andrew Lang put Theocritus, Bion and Moschus into a rhythmical, slightly old-fashioned prose in 1880, and Hugh G. Evelyn-White translated Hesiod and the Homeric Hymns for the Loeb Classical Library in 1914.

A few habits of these translators will be noticed at once. Bryant uses Latin names for the gods and heroes, so Zeus is Jupiter, Hephaestus is Vulcan and Odysseus is Ulysses. Aubrey Stewart, who translated the lives of Plutarch quoted here, spells many Greek names with a *k*, such as Perikles and Lykurgus, following the historian Grote, as he explains in his preface. Spelling, punctuation and capitals are left as each translator printed them, and that includes British forms and the odd archaic word.

Reading a Commonplace Book

Nobody needs to agree with every line in this book, and the Greeks did not agree with each other. Thrasymachus in the *Republic* says that justice is only the interest of the stronger (reading 159), and Socrates spends the rest of the dialogue answering him. Thucydides' dry remark that most people accept the first story that comes to hand (reading 285) falls in the same autumn as Sappho's quiet confidence that she and her friends will be remembered (reading 309). The pleasure of the old commonplace books lay partly in these collisions.

Take each reading as the start of a conversation. Read it twice, once for sense and once for sound. Ask who is speaking, to whom, and what they want. If a line stays with you, follow it back to the work it came from; the Sources of the Texts names every edition.

How to Use This Book

Each day has a heading with the date and a reading number. The readings are numbered from 1 on January 1 to 366 on December 31, with February 29 as reading 60, and the Index of Authors uses these numbers.

Below the reading comes an italic line naming the author, the work, the place in the work and the translator. The place is given as the translator's own edition gives it: a book and chapter for most prose, a line range for Hesiod and the Homeric Hymns, a fragment number for Sappho, an idyl for Theocritus, a speaker for the plays. Two systems need a word of explanation. Richard Crawley's Thucydides numbers its chapters straight through the whole work, so Book II, chapter VII means the seventh of Crawley's chapters, which falls in Thucydides' second book. Evelyn-White's line numbers give the range of the paragraph in which a reading stands, not the exact lines of the reading. Wharton's fragment numbers are his own and do not match later editions.

After the italic line comes one sentence of context: who is speaking, to whom, and what has just happened. The sentences say only what the source itself shows.

Verse is printed as a single paragraph. A slash with a space on each side marks the end of each of the translator's lines, as is usual when verse is quoted in prose.

The quotations are exact copies of the printed translations. The translators' footnotes, the small numbers and markers that point to them, and the page numbers some editions print in the text have been left out. Nothing else has been changed or removed.

January

January is a month of beginnings, and its readings turn on the oldest Greek advice for anyone starting out: know yourself. Philosophers, poets and historians come back to it from different sides, asking what a person really owns, what can be learned, and why no life can be judged before its end.

JANUARY 1 · READING 1

When he was asked what was very difficult, he said, "To know oneself." And what was easy, "To advise another."

Diogenes Laertius, Lives of Eminent Philosophers, Book I, Thales; translated by C. D. Yonge

Thales of Miletus heads the wise men of Diogenes' first book; this pair of answers is among the sayings Diogenes collected for him.

JANUARY 2 · READING 2

For if I tell you that to do as you say would be a disobedience to the God, and therefore that I cannot hold my tongue, you will not believe that I am serious; and if I say again that daily to discourse about virtue, and of those other things about which you hear me examining myself and others, is the greatest good of man, and that the unexamined life is not worth living, you are still less likely to believe me.

Plato, Apology, Socrates' defense; translated by Benjamin Jowett

On trial for his life at Athens, Socrates explains why he cannot simply promise to stop questioning people and live quietly.

❧

January 3 · Reading 3

He used also to say that the daemon foretold the future to him; and that to begin well was not a trifling thing, but yet not far from a trifling thing; and that he knew nothing, except the fact of his ignorance.

Diogenes Laertius, Lives of Eminent Philosophers, Book II, Socrates; translated by C. D. Yonge

Among the sayings of Socrates that Diogenes collected is this one: the beginning of wisdom is knowing what one does not know.

❧

January 4 · Reading 4

Sing the wrath of Peleus' son, / Achilles; sing the deadly wrath that brought / Woes numberless upon the Greeks, and swept / To Hades many a valiant soul, and gave / Their limbs a prey to dogs and birds of air — / For so had Jove appointed—from the time / When the two chiefs, Atrides, king of men, / And great Achilles, parted first as foes.

Homer, Iliad, Book I; translated by William Cullen Bryant

The Iliad begins by naming its subject: the anger of Achilles after his quarrel with Agamemnon, son of Atreus, whom Bryant calls Atrides.

❧

JANUARY 5 · READING 5

The apothegm, "know yourself," is his; though Antisthenes in his *Successions* says that it belongs to Phemonoe, but that Chilo appropriated it as his own.

Diogenes Laertius, Lives of Eminent Philosophers, Book I, Thales; translated by C. D. Yonge
Diogenes gives the most famous Greek maxim to Thales of Miletus, but records, as he often does, the writers who said otherwise.

❧

JANUARY 6 · READING 6

I neither know nor think that I know.

Plato, Apology, Socrates' defense; translated by Benjamin Jowett
Socrates tells the jury how he questioned a man reputed wise and found that neither of them knew anything really beautiful and good.

❧

JANUARY 7 · READING 7

He was asked on one occasion what learning was the most necessary, and he replied: "To unlearn one's bad habits."

Diogenes Laertius, Lives of Eminent Philosophers, Book VI, Antisthenes; translated by C. D. Yonge
Antisthenes, an Athenian who knew Socrates, opens Diogenes' sixth book, which also holds the lives of Diogenes the Cynic and his followers.

❧

January 8 · Reading 8

Tell me, O Muse, of that sagacious man / Who, having overthrown the sacred town / Of Ilium, wandered far and visited / The capitals of many nations, learned / The customs of their dwellers, and endured / Great suffering on the deep: his life was oft / In peril, as he labored to bring back / His comrades to their homes.

Homer, Odyssey, Book I; translated by William Cullen Bryant
The Odyssey opens on its hero, the Greek chief Odysseus, whom Bryant calls by his Latin name, Ulysses, as he does with the gods.

❧

January 9 · Reading 9

Having lighted a candle in the daytime, he said: "I am looking for a man."

Diogenes Laertius, Lives of Eminent Philosophers, Book VI, Diogenes; translated by C. D. Yonge
Diogenes the Cynic, a native of Sinope, taught as much by what he did in public as by what he said.

❧

January 10 · Reading 10

You know also that the beginning is the most important part of any work, especially in the case of a young and tender thing; for that is the time at which the character is being formed and the desired impression is more readily taken.

Plato, The Republic, Book II, Socrates; translated by Benjamin Jowett
Socrates turns to the education of children and the stories they should first be told.

❧

January 11 · Reading 11

Another saying of his was: "Watch your opportunity."

Diogenes Laertius, Lives of Eminent Philosophers, Book I, Pittacus; translated by C. D. Yonge
Pittacus of Mitylene, one of the men the Greeks counted wise, helped to put down Melanchrus, the tyrant of Lesbos.

❧

January 12 · Reading 12

Few sons are like / Their fathers: most are worse, a very few / Excel their parents. Since thou wilt not lack / Valor and wisdom in the coming time, / Nor is thy father's shrewdness wanting quite / In thee, great hope there is that happily / This plan will be fulfilled.

Homer, Odyssey, Book II; translated by William Cullen Bryant
Pallas, in the form of Ulysses' old friend Mentor, encourages his son Telemachus, who is setting out to seek news of his father.

❧

January 13 · Reading 13

He used to express his astonishment at the grammarians for being desirous to learn everything about the misfortunes of Ulysses, and being ignorant of their own. He used also to say: "That the musicians fitted the strings to the lyre properly, but left all the habits of their soul ill-arranged."

Diogenes Laertius, Lives of Eminent Philosophers, Book VI, Diogenes; translated by C. D. Yonge
Diogenes the Cynic scolds scholars who know all about the troubles of Ulysses in Homer and nothing about their own.

❧

January 14 · Reading 14

This is the Showing forth of the Inquiry of Herodotus of Halicarnassos, to the end that neither the deeds of men may be forgotten by lapse of time, nor the works great and marvellous, which have been produced some by Hellenes and some by Barbarians, may lose their renown; and especially that the causes may be remembered for which these waged war with one another.

Herodotus, Histories, Book I, opening; translated by G. C. Macaulay
The first sentence of the first great work of Greek history; the war it promises to explain is the one between the Greeks and the Persian empire.

❧

January 15 · Reading 15

Once, when he was asked what was the virtue of a young man, he said: "To avoid excess in everything."

Diogenes Laertius, Lives of Eminent Philosophers, Book II, Socrates; translated by C. D. Yonge
In his life of Socrates, Diogenes Laertius gathers many short sayings; this answer was given to a question about the young.

❧

January 16 · Reading 16

And they met together and dedicated in the temple of Apollo at Delphi, as the firstfruits of their wisdom, the far-famed inscriptions, which are in all men's mouths—"Know thyself," and "Nothing too much."

Plato, Protagoras, Socrates; translated by Benjamin Jowett
Socrates describes the Seven Wise Men of old, whose wisdom took the form of short memorable sentences.

❧

January 17 · Reading 17

In whatsoever you desire to be deemed good, endeavour to be good. For of all the virtues namable among men, consider, and you will find there is not one but may be increased by learning and practice.

Xenophon, Memorabilia, Book II, chapter VI, Socrates; translated by H. G. Dakyns
Socrates tells Critobulus that pretending to be what one is not will fail when put to the test.

❧

January 18 · Reading 18

If you wish to be good, first believe that you are bad.

Epictetus, Fragments, Fragment III; translated by George Long
Long translated these short sayings, gathered by later anthologists under Epictetus' name, while warning that some of them are certainly not his.

❧

January 19 · Reading 19

Moreover, if there be any intermissions in philosophy, and yet your later studies are firmer and more continuous than your former ones, it is no bad indication that your sloth has been expelled by labour and exercise; for the contrary is a bad sign, when after a short time your lapses from zeal become many and continuous, as if your zeal were dying away.

Plutarch, Morals, How One May Be Aware of One's Progress in Virtue, section IV; translated by Arthur Richard Shilleto

Plutarch gives signs by which a student of philosophy can tell whether he is really making progress.

❧

January 20 · Reading 20

Being asked what was pleasant to men, he replied: "Hope."

Diogenes Laertius, Lives of Eminent Philosophers, Book I, Bias; translated by C. D. Yonge

Bias, a citizen of Priene, was one of the men the Greeks counted wise; one writer put him at the head of the seven.

❧

January 21 · Reading 21

My mother said to me— / The goddess, silver-footed Thetis, said— / A twofold fate conducts me to my death;— / If I remain to fight beneath the walls / Of Ilium, my return will be cut off, / But deathless my renown; if I return / To the dear land in which my fathers dwell, / My glory will be nought, but long my life, / And late will come to me the stroke of death.

Homer, Iliad, Book IX; translated by William Cullen Bryant
Envoys from Agamemnon beg Achilles to return to the fighting; he tells them of the choice his mother Thetis set before him.

❧

January 22 · Reading 22

Of all these days, being in number twenty-six thousand two hundred and fifty, which go to the seventy years, one day produces nothing at all which resembles what another brings with it. Thus then, O Croesus, man is altogether a creature of accident.

Herodotus, Histories, Book I, chapter 32; translated by G. C. Macaulay
Solon tells King Croesus of Lydia why he will call no man happy until he has seen how that man's life ends.

❧

January 23 · Reading 23

For, as I was saying, I want to know not about this, but about myself: am I a monster more complicated and swollen with passion than the serpent Typho, or a creature of a gentler and simpler sort, to whom Nature has given a diviner and lowlier destiny?

Plato, Phaedrus, Socrates; translated by Benjamin Jowett
Walking outside the walls of Athens, Socrates explains why he has no time to test the old myths: he must first follow the Delphic command to know himself.

❧

January 24 · Reading 24

Because, the man who knows himself knows what is advantageous to himself; he discerns the limits of his powers, and by doing what he knows, he provides himself with what he needs and so does well; or, conversely, by holding aloof from what he knows not, he avoids mistakes and thereby mishaps.

Xenophon, Memorabilia, Book IV, chapter II, Socrates; translated by H. G. Dakyns
Socrates asks the young Euthydemus, who has collected a large library, whether he took to heart the inscription on the temple at Delphi.

❧

January 25 · Reading 25

If then you wish not to be of an angry temper, do not feed the habit: throw nothing on it which will increase it: at first keep quiet, and count the days on which you have not been angry. I used to be in passion every day; now every second day; then every third, then every fourth. But if you have intermitted thirty days, make a sacrifice to God. For the habit at first begins to be weakened, and then is completely destroyed.

Epictetus, Discourses, Book II, chapter XVIII; translated by George Long
Epictetus describes how a bad habit is starved by refusing to feed it day after day.

❧

January 26 · Reading 26

In the morning when thou risest unwillingly, let this thought be present —I am rising to the work of a human being.

Marcus Aurelius, Meditations, Book V, section 1; translated by George Long
The emperor Marcus Aurelius, writing notes to himself, argues with his own wish to stay in bed.

❧

January 27 · Reading 27

A whole is that which has a beginning, a middle, and an end.

Aristotle, Poetics, chapter VII; translated by S. H. Butcher
Aristotle says that the plot of a tragedy must be complete and whole, and then defines what a whole is.

❧

January 28 · Reading 28

Similarly I have had an object in telling you my dream. It is that the young may be guided to the better way and set themselves to Culture, especially any among them who is recreant for fear of poverty, and minded to enter the wrong path, to the ruin of a nature not all ignoble.

Lucian, The Vision, a chapter of autobiography; translated by H. W. and F. G. Fowler

Lucian tells how, as a boy apprenticed to his uncle, a statuary, he dreamed that two women, Statuary and Culture, competed for him, and he chose Culture.

❧

January 29 · Reading 29

Death is a debt that all mortals must pay: and there is not of them one, who knows whether he shall live the coming morrow: for what depends on fortune is uncertain how it will turn out, and is not to be learned, neither is it detected by art. Having heard these things then, and learned them from me, make thyself merry, drink, and think the life allowed from day to day thine own, but the rest Fortune's.

Euripides, Alcestis, Hercules to the servant; translated by Theodore Alois Buckley

Hercules, a guest who does not know that the dead woman is his host's wife, lectures a gloomy servant on how to live.

❧

January 30 · Reading 30

Again we see actors and singers on the stage oftentimes slack and remiss, and not taking sufficient pains about their performances in the theatres when they have it all to themselves; but when there is a competition and contest with others, they not only wake up but tune their instruments, and adjust their chords, and play on the flute with more care. Similarly whoever knows that his enemy is antagonistic to his life and character, pays more attention to himself, and watches his behaviour more carefully, and regulates his life.

Plutarch, Morals, How a Man May Be Benefited by His Enemies, section III; translated by Arthur Richard Shilleto

Plutarch writes to a friend in public life that an enemy watching for our faults can make us more careful of ourselves.

❧

January 31 · Reading 31

That man is altogether best who considers all things himself and marks what will be better afterwards and at the end; and he, again, is good who listens to a good adviser; but whoever neither thinks for himself nor keeps in mind what another tells him, he is an unprofitable man.

Hesiod, Works and Days, lines 293–319; translated by Hugh G. Evelyn-White

Hesiod addresses his brother Perses, who has wasted his share of their inheritance.

February

The short month is given to friendship and love: the friend who stands by in danger, the good neighbor, the husband and wife, and the brothers who quarrel. Several readings ask how friends are won and what they owe each other.

FEBRUARY 1 · READING 32

He was once asked what a friend is; and his answer was: "One soul abiding in two bodies."

Diogenes Laertius, Lives of Eminent Philosophers, Book V, Aristotle; translated by C. D. Yonge
Aristotle's definition of a friend, as Diogenes reports it among his sayings.

FEBRUARY 2 · READING 33

There is no better, no more blessed state, / Than when the wife and husband in accord / Order their household lovingly.

Homer, Odyssey, Book VI; translated by William Cullen Bryant
Shipwrecked and alone, Ulysses wishes the young princess Nausicaa a husband, a home and a happy marriage.

❧

February 3 · Reading 34

He was the first person, as Timaeus says, who asserted that the property of friends is common, and that friendship is equality.

Diogenes Laertius, Lives of Eminent Philosophers, Book VIII, Pythagoras; translated by C. D. Yonge

Diogenes credits Pythagoras, on the word of a writer named Timaeus, with two maxims about friends.

❧

February 4 · Reading 35

My guest, it were not right to treat with scorn / A stranger, though he were of humbler sort / Than thou, for strangers and the poor are sent / By Jove; our gifts are small, though gladly given, / As it must ever be with those who serve / Young masters, whom they fear.

Homer, Odyssey, Book XIV; translated by William Cullen Bryant

The swineherd Eumaeus welcomes a ragged stranger to his hut, not knowing that the beggar is his master Ulysses come home.

❧

February 5 · Reading 36

A bad neighbour is as great a plague as a good one is a great blessing; he who enjoys a good neighbour has a precious possession.

Hesiod, Works and Days, lines 342–351; translated by Hugh G. Evelyn-White

In a farming village, as Hesiod knew, the people next door mattered more than distant kin.

❧

February 6 · Reading 37

This it is to have companions, not relationship alone; so that a man who is congenial in manners, though a stranger in blood, is a better friend for a man to have, than ten thousand relatives.

Euripides, Orestes, Orestes to Pylades; translated by Theodore Alois Buckley
Orestes, sick and about to be tried for his life at Argos, thanks his friend Pylades, who stands by him in danger.

❧

February 7 · Reading 38

And the reason is that human nature was originally one and we were a whole, and the desire and pursuit of the whole is called love.

Plato, Symposium, Aristophanes' speech; translated by Benjamin Jowett
At a drinking party where each guest praises Love, the comic poet Aristophanes tells his fable of the first humans, cut in two.

❧

February 8 · Reading 39

He (Socrates) had often heard the remark made that of all possessions there is none equal to that of a good and sincere friend; but, in spite of this assertion, the mass of people, as far as he could see, concerned themselves about nothing so little as the acquisition of friends.

Xenophon, Memorabilia, Book II, chapter IV; translated by H. G. Dakyns
Xenophon records what Socrates said about the worth of friends.

❧

February 9 · Reading 40

Now Love masters my limbs and shakes me, fatal creature, bitter-sweet.

Sappho, Fragments, fragment 40; translated by Henry Thornton Wharton
Sappho describes love as both sweet and bitter in a line preserved by the grammarian Hephaestion.

❧

February 10 · Reading 41

"That the fellowship of brothers of one mind was stronger than any fortified city."

Diogenes Laertius, Lives of Eminent Philosophers, Book VI, Antisthenes; translated by C. D. Yonge
Antisthenes, who opens Diogenes' book on the Cynics, counted this among his favorite sayings.

❧

February 11 · Reading 42

Well does a guest remember all his days / The generous host who shows himself his friend."

Homer, Odyssey, Book XV; translated by William Cullen Bryant
Peisistratus, son of Nestor, urges Telemachus to wait for the parting gifts of their host Menelaus before they leave Sparta.

❧

FEBRUARY 12 · READING 43

Call your friend to a feast; but leave your enemy alone; and especially call him who lives near you: for if any mischief happen in the place, neighbours come ungirt, but kinsmen stay to gird themselves.

Hesiod, Works and Days, lines 342–351; translated by Hugh G. Evelyn-White

Neighbors come ungirt, that is, without stopping to fasten their belts; kinsmen who live farther off take time to dress.

❧

FEBRUARY 13 · READING 44

My nature is for mutual love, not hate.

Sophocles, Antigone, Antigone to Creon; translated by F. Storr

Antigone has buried her brother against King Creon's decree; when Creon says an enemy is still an enemy after death, she answers him with this line.

❧

FEBRUARY 14 · READING 45

But of all things as many as have life and intellect, we women are the most wretched race.

Euripides, Medea, Medea to the Chorus; translated by Theodore Alois Buckley

Medea, abandoned by her husband Jason for a new marriage, speaks to the women of Corinth about the lot of wives.

❧

FEBRUARY 15 · READING 46

For there is nothing which men love but the good.

Plato, Symposium, Diotima, as told by Socrates; translated by Benjamin Jowett
Socrates recalls what he learned about love from Diotima, a wise woman who questioned him as he questions others.

❧

FEBRUARY 16 · READING 47

Think of a horse or a yoke of oxen; they have their worth; but who shall gauge the worth of a worthy friend? Kindlier and more constant than the faithfullest of slaves—this is that possession best named all-serviceable.

Xenophon, Memorabilia, Book II, chapter IV; translated by H. G. Dakyns
Xenophon continues Socrates' praise of the good friend as the best possession of all.

❧

FEBRUARY 17 · READING 48

Now Eros shakes my soul, a wind on the mountain falling on the oaks.

Sappho, Fragments, fragment 42; translated by Henry Thornton Wharton
Sappho compares love to a mountain wind striking the oak trees.

❧

FEBRUARY 18 · READING 49

THERE is none other medicine, Nicias, against Love, neither unguent, methinks, nor salve to sprinkle,—none, save the Muses of Pieria! Now a delicate thing is their minstrelsy in man's life, and a sweet, but hard to procure.

Theocritus, Idyls, Idyl XI, The Cyclops in Love; translated by Andrew Lang
Theocritus writes to his friend Nicias, a physician and poet, and goes on to tell how the Cyclops eased his love for a sea-nymph by singing.

❧

FEBRUARY 19 · READING 50

When he was asked what a friend was, he replied: "Another I."

Diogenes Laertius, Lives of Eminent Philosophers, Book VII, Zeno; translated by C. D. Yonge
Zeno's answer is even shorter than Aristotle's: a friend is a second self.

❧

FEBRUARY 20 · READING 51

Within my court / There grew an olive-tree with full-leaved boughs, / A tall and flourishing tree; its massive stem / Was like a column. Round it I built up / A chamber with cemented stones until / The walls were finished; then I framed a roof / Above it, and put on the well-glued doors / Close fitting.

Homer, Odyssey, Book XXIII; translated by William Cullen Bryant
Penelope orders the bed of Ulysses carried out of their chamber; only the true Ulysses could know why that cannot be done, and he tells her.

❧

February 21 · Reading 52

For a man wins nothing better than a good wife, and, again, nothing worse than a bad one, a greedy soul who roasts her man without fire, strong though he may be, and brings him to a raw old age.

Hesiod, Works and Days, lines 695–705; translated by Hugh G. Evelyn-White

Hesiod's advice on marriage is blunt, and his view of women is often harsh; here he weighs a good wife against a bad one.

❧

February 22 · Reading 53

I most of all; for I have learnt, though late, / This rule, to hate an enemy as one / Who may become a friend, and serve a friend / As knowing that his friendship may not last. / An unsafe anchorage to most men proves / The bond of friendship.

Sophocles, Ajax, Ajax's speech on yielding; translated by F. Storr

Ajax, the great Greek warrior shamed at Troy, speaks of how all things change, enmity and friendship among them.

❧

February 23 · Reading 54

One should speak freely to a friend, Admetus, and, not in silence keep within our bosoms what we blame.

Euripides, Alcestis, Hercules to Admetus; translated by Theodore Alois Buckley

Hercules, a guest in the house of Admetus, reproaches his host for hiding his wife's death from him.

❧

February 24 · Reading 55

Now, I have no violent desire of any of these things; but I have a passion for friends; and I would rather have a good friend than the best cock or quail in the world: I would even go further, and say the best horse or dog. Yea, by the dog of Egypt, I should greatly prefer a real friend to all the gold of Darius, or even to Darius himself: I am such a lover of friends as that.

Plato, Lysis, Socrates; translated by Benjamin Jowett
Talking with the boys Lysis and Menexenus, Socrates admits he does not know how one friend is acquired by another.

❧

February 25 · Reading 56

And yet in fashioning two brothers God intends them, methinks, to be of more benefit to one another than either two hands, or two feet, or two eyes, or any other of those pairs which belong to man from his birth.

Xenophon, Memorabilia, Book II, chapter III, Socrates; translated by H. G. Dakyns
Socrates speaks to Chaerecrates, who has quarrelled with his elder brother Chaerephon.

❧

February 26 · Reading 57

The moon has set, and the Pleiades; it is midnight, the time is going by, and I sleep alone.

Sappho, Fragments, fragment 52; translated by Henry Thornton Wharton
A short fragment of a night poem: the moon and the cluster of stars called the Pleiades have gone down.

❧

February 27 · Reading 58

NOT for us only, Nicias, as we were used to deem, was Love begotten, by whomsoever of the Gods was the father of the child; not first to us seemed beauty beautiful, to us that are mortal men and look not on the morrow.

Theocritus, Idyls, Idyl XIII, Hylas and Heracles; translated by Andrew Lang

Theocritus opens a poem for Nicias with the story of the hero Heracles and the boy Hylas, whom he loved.

❧

February 28 · Reading 59

Happy are they that love, when with equal love they are rewarded. Happy was Theseus, when Pirithous was by his side, yea, though he went down to the house of implacable Hades.

Bion, Fragments, fragment X; translated by Andrew Lang

One of the short pieces of Bion that survive only as fragments; it recalls famous pairs of friends.

❧

FEBRUARY 29 · READING 60

For we can get neither many slaves nor many friends at small expense. What then is the purchase-money of friendship? Benevolence and complaisance conjoined with virtue, and yet nature has nothing more rare than these. And so to love or be loved very much cannot find place with many persons; for as rivers that have many channels and cuttings have a weak and thin stream, so excessive love in the soul if divided out among many is weakened.

Plutarch, Morals, On Abundance of Friends, section II; translated by Arthur Richard Shilleto

Plutarch argues that the wish for many friends is what most often keeps a person from having one true friend.

March

March brings courage, on the battlefield and off it. Generals speak to their troops and orators to their cities, but the month also holds the quieter courage of refusing to do what is wrong, and of bearing what cannot be helped.

MARCH 1 · READING 61

No living man can send me to the shades / Before my time; no man of woman born, / Coward or brave, can shun his destiny.

Homer, Iliad, Book VI; translated by William Cullen Bryant
Hector, the chief defender of Troy, comforts his wife Andromache before he goes back to the fighting.

❧

MARCH 2 · READING 62

Anger has no old age but only death; / The dead alone can feel no touch of spite.

Sophocles, Oedipus at Colonus, Creon; translated by F. Storr
Creon of Thebes, who has tried to carry off Oedipus by force, explains that the old man's curses provoked him.

❧

March 3 · Reading 63

All this / I bear in mind, dear wife; but I should stand / Ashamed before the men and long-robed dames / Of Troy, were I to keep aloof and shun / The conflict, coward-like.

Homer, Iliad, Book VI; translated by William Cullen Bryant
Andromache has begged Hector to stay inside the walls; he answers that shame would not let him.

❧

March 4 · Reading 64

Man, however, will be in the best condition, if when he is taking counsel he feels fear, reckoning to suffer everything that can possibly come, but in doing the deed he is bold.

Herodotus, Histories, Book VII, chapter 49; translated by G. C. Macaulay
Artabanus, the cautious uncle of Xerxes, gives his rule for planning and doing, as the invasion of Greece begins.

❧

March 5 · Reading 65

Yet not ingloriously or passively / I die, but first will do some valiant deed, / Of which mankind shall hear in after time."

Homer, Iliad, Book XXII; translated by William Cullen Bryant
Alone outside the walls of Troy, Hector sees that his hour has come and resolves to die fighting Achilles.

❧

March 6 · Reading 66

Or tell me, do ye like walking about and asking one another:—is there any news? Why, could there be greater news than a man of Macedonia subduing Athenians, and directing the affairs of Greece? Is Philip dead? No, but he is sick.

Demosthenes, First Philippic, the speech against Philip; translated by Charles Rann Kennedy

In his first speech against Philip of Macedon, Demosthenes mocks the Athenians for trading news in the streets while Philip takes their cities.

❧

March 7 · Reading 67

Even though some god / Smite me on the black ocean, I shall bear / The stroke, for in my bosom dwells a mind / Patient of suffering; much have I endured, / And much survived, in tempests on the deep, / And in the battle; let this happen too."

Homer, Odyssey, Book V; translated by William Cullen Bryant

Ulysses answers the goddess Calypso, who has warned him of the hardships that wait for him if he sails for home.

❧

MARCH 8 · READING 68

And where the chances are the same, knowledge fortifies courage by the contempt which is its consequence, its trust being placed, not in hope, which is the prop of the desperate, but in a judgment grounded upon existing resources, whose anticipations are more to be depended upon.

Thucydides, History of the Peloponnesian War, Book II, chapter VII; translated by Richard Crawley

Pericles reasons with the Athenians, angry at the war and the plague, about why they should hold firm.

❧

MARCH 9 · READING 69

We should heed / The will of mighty Jupiter, who bears / Rule over gods and men. One augury / There is, the surest and the best—to fight / For our own land.

Homer, Iliad, Book XII; translated by William Cullen Bryant

Polydamas reads an eagle that drops a snake as a sign to turn back from the Greek wall; Hector answers that he will not be ruled by the flight of birds.

❧

March 10 · Reading 70

Another saying of his was that it was the part of wise men, before difficult circumstances arose, to provide for their not arising; but that it was the part of brave men to make the best of existing circumstances.

Diogenes Laertius, Lives of Eminent Philosophers, Book I, Pittacus; translated by C. D. Yonge
Pittacus of Mitylene was counted among the wise men; this saying divides foresight from courage.

❧

March 11 · Reading 71

By the tall gates they stood, as giant oaks / Stand on the mountains and abide the wind / And the tempestuous rains of all the year, / Firm-planted on their strong and spreading roots.

Homer, Iliad, Book XII; translated by William Cullen Bryant
Polypoetes, son of Pirithoüs, and Leonteus hold a gate in the wall around the Greek ships as the Trojan Asius drives against it.

❧

March 12 · Reading 72

I would not count that mortal worth a doigt / Who lives on, fed by visionary hopes. / Nobly to live—that is the true knight's choice, / Or nobly end his life.

Sophocles, Ajax, Ajax; translated by F. Storr
Ajax, in despair after his disgrace, sets out the warrior's choice; a doigt is Storr's word for a coin of very little worth.

❧

MARCH 13 · READING 73

To those then who choose to act, for the most part gain is wont to come; but to those who reckon for everything and shrink back, it is not much wont to come.

Herodotus, Histories, Book VII, chapter 50; translated by G. C. Macaulay
Xerxes answers his cautious uncle with the case for boldness.

❧

MARCH 14 · READING 74

Moreover, there is a victory and defeat—the first and best of victories, the lowest and worst of defeats—which each man gains or sustains at the hands, not of another, but of himself; this shows that there is a war against ourselves going on within every one of us.

Plato, Laws, Book I, Cleinias; translated by Benjamin Jowett
Cleinias the Cretan, talking with an Athenian stranger and a Spartan, speaks of the war each man wages against himself.

❧

MARCH 15 · READING 75

It is circumstances (difficulties) which show what men are. Therefore when a difficulty falls upon you, remember that God, like a trainer of wrestlers, has matched you with a rough young man.

Epictetus, Discourses, Book I, chapter XXIV; translated by George Long
Epictetus compares hardship to a sparring partner chosen by a trainer of wrestlers.

❧

March 16 · Reading 76

When Eurybiades said to him, "Themistokles, in the public games they whip those who rise before their turn." "True," said Themistokles, "but they do not crown those who lag behind." And when Eurybiades raised his staff as if he would strike him, Themistokles said, "Strike, but hear me."

Plutarch, Lives, Life of Themistokles, chapter XI; translated by Aubrey Stewart

Before the sea battle of Salamis, the Athenian Themistokles argues with Eurybiades, the Spartan commander of the Greek fleet, who wants to withdraw.

❧

March 17 · Reading 77

Yet you, Athenians, with larger means than any people—ships, infantry, cavalry, and revenue—have never up to this day made proper use of any of them; and your war with Philip differs in no respect from the boxing of barbarians.

Demosthenes, First Philippic, the speech against Philip; translated by Charles Rann Kennedy

Demosthenes goes on to explain the comparison: the untrained boxer only clutches at each blow after it lands, as Athens only answers each of Philip's moves.

❧

March 18 · Reading 78

No cowardice then on your part, seeing the greatness of the issues at stake, and I will show that what I preach to others I can practise myself.

Thucydides, History of the Peloponnesian War, Book V, chapter XV; translated by Richard Crawley

The Spartan general Brasidas speaks to his men before he attacks the Athenians at Amphipolis.

❧

March 19 · Reading 79

One of his frequent sayings was: "That men contended with one another in punching and kicking, but that no one showed any emulation in the pursuit of virtue."

Diogenes Laertius, Lives of Eminent Philosophers, Book VI, Diogenes; translated by C. D. Yonge

Diogenes the Cynic sets the effort men spend on contests of strength against the little they spend on goodness.

❧

March 20 · Reading 80

Whosoe'er among you all, / Wounded or beaten down, shall meet his death, / So let him die; 'tis no inglorious fate / To perish fighting in his country's cause; / And he shall leave his wife and children safe, / His home and household store inviolate, / If now the Greeks depart to their own land.

Homer, Iliad, Book XV; translated by William Cullen Bryant

Hector urges the Trojans on toward the Greek ships, sure that Jupiter is fighting on their side.

❧

March 21 · Reading 81

All too clearly I foresee / The things that come, and nought of pain shall be / By me unlooked-for; but I needs must bear / My destiny as best I may, knowing well / The might resistless of Necessity.

Aeschylus, Prometheus Bound, lines 101–105, Prometheus; translated by E. H. Plumptre

Left alone on the rock, Prometheus, who can see the future, resolves to bear what is coming.

❧

March 22 · Reading 82

Nathless, since I was sent to aid thee, prince, / I fear to seem a laggard; yet prefer / To fail with honour than succeed by fraud.

Sophocles, Philoctetes, Neoptolemus to Odysseus; translated by F. Storr

The young Neoptolemus, son of Achilles, is asked by Odysseus to trick the wounded Philoctetes; his first answer is this.

❧

March 23 · Reading 83

Stranger, report this word, we pray, to the Spartans, that lying Here in this spot we remain, faithfully keeping their laws.

Herodotus, Histories, Book VII, chapter 228; translated by G. C. Macaulay

The Greeks who fell at Thermopylae were buried where they fell, and this inscription was set up for the Spartans.

❧

March 24 · Reading 84

I should say that courage is a sort of endurance of the soul, if I am to speak of the universal nature which pervades them all.

Plato, Laches, Laches; translated by Benjamin Jowett
Laches, an Athenian general, tries a second time to say what courage is when Socrates asks.

❧

March 25 · Reading 85

Still my belief is that by learning and practice the natural aptitude may always be strengthened towards courage.

Xenophon, Memorabilia, Book III, chapter IX, Socrates; translated by H. G. Dakyns
Asked whether courage is taught or comes by nature, Socrates gives a careful answer.

❧

March 26 · Reading 86

But I wish to be purple, that small part which is bright, and makes all the rest appear graceful and beautiful. Why then do you tell me to make myself like the many? and if I do, how shall I still be purple?

Epictetus, Discourses, Book I, chapter II; translated by George Long
Agrippinus, a Roman Stoic, refused to perform in Nero's spectacles; when Florus asked why, he said Florus thought himself only one thread in the tunic.

❧

March 27 · Reading 87

The Sun beat the North Wind. For when it blew a strong and terrible blast, and tried to make the man remove his cloak, he only drew it round him more closely, but when the Sun came out with its warm rays, at first warmed and afterwards scorched, he stripped himself of coat as well as cloak.

Plutarch, Morals, Conjugal Precepts, section XII; translated by Arthur Richard Shilleto

Plutarch wrote these short precepts as a wedding gift for a young couple, Pollianus and Eurydice; this one retells an old fable.

❧

March 28 · Reading 88

'Tis dead level among the dead, Antilochus; strength and beauty are no more; we welter all in the same gloom, one no better than another; the shades of Trojans fear me not, Achaeans pay me no reverence; each may say what he will; a man is a ghost, 'or be he churl, or be he peer.' It irks me; I would fain be a servant, and alive.

Lucian, Dialogues of the Dead, dialogue XV, Achilles to Antilochus; translated by H. W. and F. G. Fowler

Among the dead, Antilochus reproaches Achilles for saying he would rather be a poor man's servant on earth than king of the dead; Achilles answers him.

❧

March 29 · Reading 89

Why do I mention this? To show and convince you, Athenians, that nothing, if you take precaution, is to be feared, nothing, if you are negligent, goes as you desire.

Demosthenes, First Philippic, the speech against Philip; translated by Charles Rann Kennedy

Demosthenes reminds the Athenians that they once humbled Sparta by attending to their duties, and that the same care can stop Philip.

❧

March 30 · Reading 90

We are both warlike and wise, and it is our sense of order that makes us so. We are warlike, because self-control contains honour as a chief constituent, and honour bravery.

Thucydides, History of the Peloponnesian War, Book I, chapter III, Archidamus; translated by Richard Crawley

Archidamus, king of Sparta, answers those who call the Spartans slow, at the congress that voted for war with Athens.

❧

MARCH 31 · READING 91

Fear not then any longer the hostile spear of the Argives; for I myself, old man, before I am commanded, am prepared to die, and to stand for slaughter; for what shall we say if the city thinks fit for our sakes to encounter a great danger, but we putting toils on others, avoid death when we can be saved?

Euripides, The Heraclidae, Macaria; translated by Theodore Alois Buckley
An oracle demands a maiden's life for Athens to win; Macaria, daughter of Heracles, offers her own.

April

April belongs to work and the seasons. Hesiod's farming calendar sets the tone, and beside it stand craftsmen, spinners, debtors and philosophers who earn their bread, along with a few warnings against putting things off until tomorrow.

APRIL 1 · READING 92

Badness can be got easily and in shoals: the road to her is smooth, and she lives very near us. But between us and Goodness the gods have placed the sweat of our brows: long and steep is the path that leads to her, and it is rough at the first; but when a man has reached the top, then is she easy to reach, though before that she was hard.

Hesiod, Works and Days, lines 286–292; translated by Hugh G. Evelyn-White

The Works and Days is a farmer's poem of advice addressed to Hesiod's brother Perses; this is its best-known picture of the hard road to goodness.

❧

April 2 · Reading 93

The fruit they bear / Falls not, nor ever fails in winter time / Nor summer, but is yielded all the year. / The ever-blowing west-wind causes some / To swell and some to ripen; pear succeeds / To pear; to apple apple, grape to grape, / Fig ripens after fig.

Homer, Odyssey, Book VII; translated by William Cullen Bryant
Shipwrecked on the island of the Phaeacians, Ulysses comes to the palace of King Alcinoüs and finds beside it a garden that bears fruit in every season.

❧

April 3 · Reading 94

Work is no disgrace: it is idleness which is a disgrace.

Hesiod, Works and Days, lines 293–319; translated by Hugh G. Evelyn-White
Hesiod's whole poem turns on this claim: honest work, not idleness and not quarrels over property, is the way to a decent life.

❧

April 4 · Reading 95

Do you not know that even a weakling by nature may, by dint of exercise and practice, come to outdo a giant who neglects his body?

Xenophon, Memorabilia, Book I, chapter VI, Socrates; translated by H. G. Dakyns
Socrates goes on answering Antiphon, who thinks his hard way of life a misery.

❧

April 5 · Reading 96

Do not put your work off till to-morrow and the day after; for a sluggish worker does not fill his barn, nor one who puts off his work: industry makes work go well, but a man who puts off work is always at hand-grips with ruin.

Hesiod, Works and Days, lines 405–413; translated by Hugh G. Evelyn-White

Before his calendar of the farming year, Hesiod sets down the first rule of the working household.

❧

April 6 · Reading 97

I asked them all of thee, / When by thy side I trod the garden walks, / A little boy. We went among the trees, / And thou didst name them. Of the pear thirteen, / And of the apple ten thou gavest me, / And forty fig-trees; and thou didst engage / To give me fifty rows of vines, each row / Of growth to feed the winepress.

Homer, Odyssey, Book XXIV; translated by William Cullen Bryant

Home at last, Ulysses finds his old father Laertes working in the orchard, and proves who he is by naming the trees Laertes gave him as a boy.

❧

April 7 · Reading 98

She stirs up even the shiftless to toil; for a man grows eager to work when he considers his neighbour, a rich man who hastens to plough and plant and put his house in good order; and neighbour vies with his neighbour as he hurries after wealth. This Strife is wholesome for men.

Hesiod, Works and Days, lines 11–24; translated by Hugh G. Evelyn-White

Hesiod opens his advice to his brother Perses by saying there are two kinds of Strife: one breeds war, the other honest rivalry between neighbors.

❧

April 8 · Reading 99

Know then that among things that are lovely and of good report, not one have the gods bestowed upon mortal men apart from toil and pains.

Xenophon, Memorabilia, Book II, chapter I, Socrates; translated by H. G. Dakyns

Socrates retells the sophist Prodicus' fable of young Heracles, who is met by two women, Virtue and Vice; here Virtue speaks.

❧

APRIL 9 · READING 100

The man who is rich in fancy thinks his waggon as good as built already —the fool! He does not know that there are a hundred timbers to a waggon. Take care to lay these up beforehand at home.

Hesiod, Works and Days, lines 448–457; translated by Hugh G. Evelyn-White

When the crane's cry signals the ploughing season, Hesiod says, the farmer must already have his oxen fed and his timbers gathered.

❧

APRIL 10 · READING 101

'TIS Poverty alone, Diophantus, that awakens the arts; Poverty, the very teacher of labour.

Theocritus, Idyls, Idyl XXI; translated by Andrew Lang

The poem tells of two old fishermen in a reed hut by the sea; one has dreamed of catching a golden fish.

❧

APRIL 11 · READING 102

O aged man! there is no lack of skill / In tending this fair orchard, which thy care / Keeps flourishing; no growth is there of fig, / Vine, pear, or olive, or of plants that grow / In borders, that has missed thy friendly hand.

Homer, Odyssey, Book XXIV; translated by William Cullen Bryant

Before he makes himself known, Ulysses speaks to his father as a stranger and praises the old man's care of his orchard.

❧

April 12 · Reading 103

For dawn takes away a third part of your work, dawn advances a man on his journey and advances him in his work,—dawn which appears and sets many men on their road, and puts yokes on many oxen.

Hesiod, Works and Days, lines 571–581; translated by Hugh G. Evelyn-White

At harvest, Hesiod tells Perses, leave the shady seat and the late sleep; the early hours are the best of the working day.

❧

April 13 · Reading 104

And yet this you do know; joy is not to him who feels that he is doing well in nothing—it belongs to one who is persuaded that things are progressing with him, be it tillage or the working of a vessel, or any of the thousand and one things on which a man may chance to be employed.

Xenophon, Memorabilia, Book I, chapter VI, Socrates; translated by H. G. Dakyns

Socrates answers Antiphon, who mocked him for his poverty and his hard way of life.

❧

APRIL 14 · READING 105

Nothing great, said Epictetus, is produced suddenly, since not even the grape or the fig is. If you say to me now that you want a fig, I will answer to you that it requires time: let it flower first, then put forth fruit, and then ripen.

Epictetus, Discourses, Book I, chapter XV; translated by George Long
A man asks how he can keep his mind steady while his brother refuses to be reconciled with him.

❧

APRIL 15 · READING 106

'Tis thus that men should sing who labour i' the sun, but thy starveling love, thou clod, 'twere fit to tell to thy mother when she stirs in bed at dawning.

Theocritus, Idyls, Idyl X; translated by Andrew Lang
Two reapers talk as they cut the corn: Battus, sick with love, sings of his sweetheart, and sturdy Milon answers with a string of country harvest verses.

❧

APRIL 16 · READING 107

It beseems not mortals to judge the works of God; for sacred are all these things, and all are sweet, yet for thy sake I will speak out, Cleodamus, and declare what is sweeter to me than the rest.

Bion, The Seasons, Myrson; translated by Andrew Lang
Two herdsmen, Cleodamus and Myrson, talk over which season is sweetest; Myrson will choose spring.

❧

April 17 · Reading 108

Trees then he felled, and soon the task was done. / Twenty in all he brought to earth, and squared / Their trunks with the sharp steel, and carefully / He smoothed their sides, and wrought them by a line. / Calypso, gracious goddess, having brought / Wimbles, he bored the beams, and, fitting them / Together, made them fast with nails and clamps.

Homer, Odyssey, Book V; translated by William Cullen Bryant
Released at last by the nymph Calypso, Ulysses builds with his own hands the raft that will carry him from her island.

❧

April 18 · Reading 109

How then, will you say, am I to maintain myself? Do you ask this, having two hands, two legs, and a tongue, in short, being a man, to love and be loved, to give and receive benefits?

Plutarch, Morals, Against Borrowing Money, section VI; translated by Arthur Richard Shilleto
Plutarch argues that it is better to live plainly and work than to fall into debt.

❧

APRIL 19 · READING 110

He who adds to what he has, will keep off bright-eyed hunger; for if you add only a little to a little and do this often, soon that little will become great.

Hesiod, Works and Days, lines 352–369; translated by Hugh G. Evelyn-White

Among Hesiod's rules for keeping a household, this one praises small savings made often.

❧

APRIL 20 · READING 111

Then, I said, let us begin and create in idea a State; and yet the true creator is necessity, who is the mother of our invention.

Plato, The Republic, Book II, Socrates; translated by Benjamin Jowett

Socrates begins to build an imaginary city from the ground up, starting from the simple needs of food, shelter and clothing.

❧

APRIL 21 · READING 112

Thereupon a capital was provided; wools were purchased; the good man's relatives set to work, and even whilst they breakfasted they worked, and on and on till work was ended and they supped. Smiles took the place of frowns; they no longer looked askance with suspicion, but full into each other's eyes with happiness.

Xenophon, Memorabilia, Book II, chapter VII; translated by H. G. Dakyns

Aristarchus, with fourteen kinswomen crowded into his house during civil strife, took Socrates' advice to set them to the wool work they knew.

❧

April 22 · Reading 113

Every habit and faculty is maintained and increased by the corresponding actions: the habit of walking by walking, the habit of running by running. If you would be a good reader, read; if a writer, write.

Epictetus, Discourses, Book II, chapter XVIII; translated by George Long
Epictetus explains how habits, good and bad, grow by use, and how to starve a bad one.

❧

April 23 · Reading 114

Spring's messenger, the sweet-voiced nightingale.

Sappho, Fragments, fragment 39; translated by Henry Thornton Wharton
One of the shortest of the surviving fragments, a single line in praise of a bird.

❧

April 24 · Reading 115

And thee, distaff, thou child of fair carven ivory, I will give into the hands of the wife of Nicias: with her shalt thou fashion many a thing, garments for men, and much rippling raiment that women wear.

Theocritus, Idyls, Idyl XXVIII; translated by Andrew Lang
Theocritus wrote this poem to go with the gift of an ivory distaff for Theugenis, wife of his friend Nicias, a physician of Miletus.

❧

APRIL 25 · READING 116

The constant dropping of water, says the proverb, it wears a hole in a stone.

Bion, Fragments, fragment XVII; translated by Andrew Lang
A single line of Bion, born at Smyrna, which survives only as a fragment.

❧

APRIL 26 · READING 117

He used to praise leisure as the most valuable of possessions, as Xenophon tells us in his *Banquet*.

Diogenes Laertius, Lives of Eminent Philosophers, Book II, Socrates; translated by C. D. Yonge
Diogenes Laertius takes this report about Socrates from Xenophon, whose memoirs of Socrates also appear in this book.

❧

APRIL 27 · READING 118

There too he sculptured a broad fallow field / Of soft rich mould, thrice ploughed, and over which / Walked many a ploughman, guiding to and fro / His steers, and when on their return they reached / The border of the field the master came / To meet them, placing in the hands of each / A goblet of rich wine. Then turned they back / Along the furrows, diligent to reach / Their distant end. All dark behind the plough / The ridges lay, a marvel to the sight, / Like real furrows, though engraved in gold.

Homer, Iliad, Book XVIII; translated by William Cullen Bryant
Vulcan forges new armor for Achilles at the request of his mother Thetis; the shield shows scenes of the whole world.

❧

April 28 · Reading 119

Sweet unto diverse men is the meed that from labour they reap, / To the shepherd, the ploughman, the fowler, to him who is fed from the sea.

Pindar, Isthmian Odes, Isthmian I, epode 3; translated by Arthur S. Way
In an ode for Herodotus of Thebes, a chariot victor, Pindar sets the athlete's glory beside the humbler rewards of other kinds of work.

❧

April 29 · Reading 120

And King Antigonus asked Cleanthes, when he saw him at Athens after a long interval, "Do you still grind, Cleanthes?" And he replied, "I do, O king, but for my living, yet so as not to desert philosophy.

Plutarch, Morals, Against Borrowing Money, section VII; translated by Arthur Richard Shilleto
Plutarch argues that honest work of any kind is better than living on borrowed money, and gives examples.

❧

April 30 · Reading 121

Happy is the man whom you delight to honour! He has all things abundantly: his fruitful land is laden with corn, his pastures are covered with cattle, and his house is filled with good things.

Homeric Hymns, To Earth the Mother of All, lines 1–16; translated by Hugh G. Evelyn-White
The poet tells the Earth what she gives to those she favors.

May

May turns to nature, beauty and song: meadows, springs, stars and plane trees, and the poets and singers who praised them. Many of these readings are verse, and the line marks show where the translator's lines end.

MAY 1 · READING 122

Chiefest is water of all things, for streaming / Therefrom all life and existence came; / And all proud treasure of princes the gleaming / Splendour of gold outshines, as the flame / Of a great fire flings through the night its rays.

Pindar, Olympian Odes, Olympian I, strophe 1; translated by Arthur S. Way

The opening of Pindar's ode for Hiero of Syracuse, who won at the Olympic Games; water and gold lead up to the praise of Olympia.

❧

MAY 2 · READING 123

Beloved Pan, and all ye other gods who haunt this place, give me beauty in the inward soul; and may the outward and inward man be at one.

Plato, Phaedrus, Socrates' prayer; translated by Benjamin Jowett

Before leaving the riverside spot where he and Phaedrus have talked all day, Socrates says a prayer to the gods of the place.

❧

MAY 3 · READING 124

And song, the Muses' child inspired, can lay / On the heart's wounds her magic hands of healing. / Not steaming baths so softly charm away / The ache of toil, as words of praise outpealing / In unison with the lyre.

Pindar, Nemean Odes, Nemean IV, strophe 1; translated by Arthur S. Way
Pindar opens an ode for a victor at the Nemean Games by praising the power of song after hard effort.

❧

MAY 4 · READING 125

The stars about the fair moon in their turn hide their bright face when she at about her full lights up all earth with silver.

Sappho, Fragments, fragment 3; translated by Henry Thornton Wharton
Only scattered pieces of Sappho's poems survive, many quoted by later writers; Wharton gave each a plain prose version beside the Greek.

❧

MAY 5 · READING 126

The fairest meed of the gods is song.

Theocritus, Idyls, Idyl XXII, The Dioscuri; translated by Andrew Lang
Theocritus ends his hymn to the twin heroes Castor and Polydeuces by offering them the best gift he has.

❧

MAY 6 · READING 127

As when in heaven the stars look brightly forth / Round the clear-shining moon, while not a breeze / Stirs in the depths of air, and all the stars / Are seen, and gladness fills the shepherd's heart, / So many fires in sight of Ilium blazed, / Lit by the sons of Troy, between the ships / And eddying Xanthus: on the plain there shone / A thousand; fifty warriors by each fire / Sat in its light.

Homer, Iliad, Book VIII; translated by William Cullen Bryant

At nightfall the Trojans camp on the plain between the Greek ships and the river Xanthus, keeping fires alight so that the Greeks cannot slip away in the dark.

❧

MAY 7 · READING 128

I will sing of well-founded Earth, mother of all, eldest of all beings. She feeds all creatures that are in the world, all that go upon the goodly land, and all that are in the paths of the seas, and all that fly: all these are fed of her store.

Homeric Hymns, To Earth the Mother of All, lines 1–16; translated by Hugh G. Evelyn-White

A short hymn to the Earth, from the collection of Greek poems known as the Homeric Hymns.

❧

MAY 8 · READING 129

After him the shrilly wailing daughter of Pandion, the swallow, appears to men when spring is just beginning.

Hesiod, Works and Days, lines 564–570; translated by Hugh G. Evelyn-White

Hesiod marks the farmer's year by stars and birds; the daughter of Pandion is his poetic name for the swallow, the sign of spring.

❧

MAY 9 · READING 130

How delightful is the breeze:—so very sweet; and there is a sound in the air shrill and summerlike which makes answer to the chorus of the cicadae. But the greatest charm of all is the grass, like a pillow gently sloping to the head.

Plato, Phaedrus, Socrates; translated by Benjamin Jowett

Socrates, who seldom leaves the city, praises the spot by the river Ilissus where he and Phaedrus sit down to talk.

❧

MAY 10 · READING 131

The oak is the most beautiful of all wild trees, and the strongest of those which are artificially cultivated. It afforded men in early times both food and drink, by its acorns and the honey found in it, while by the bird-lime which it produces, it enables them to catch most kinds of birds and other creatures, as additional dainties.

Plutarch, Lives, Life of Caius Marcius Coriolanus, chapter III; translated by Aubrey Stewart
Plutarch explains why the Romans gave a crown of oak leaves to a soldier who saved a fellow citizen's life in battle.

❧

MAY 11 · READING 132

O golden Lyre, who art Phoebus' treasure / Which he shares with the dusk-haired Song-queens aye, / The light feet hear thee beating the measure / As the revellers marshal their dance-array.

Pindar, Pythian Odes, Pythian I, strophe 1; translated by Arthur S. Way
The ode for Hiero, ruler of Syracuse, after his chariot victory of 470 BC opens with a hymn to Apollo's golden lyre.

❧

MAY 12 · READING 133

As on the hills the shepherds trample the hyacinth under foot, and the flower darkens on the ground.

Sappho, Fragments, fragment 94; translated by Henry Thornton Wharton
A fragment that pictures a hyacinth trampled on the hills; Wharton notes lines of Catullus and Vergil that echo it.

❧

MAY 13 · READING 134

Sweet, meseems, is the whispering sound of yonder pine tree, goatherd, that murmureth by the wells of water; and sweet are thy pipings.

Theocritus, Idyls, Idyl I; translated by Andrew Lang
The first Idyl opens in a shady place beside a spring in Sicily, where the shepherd Thyrsis and a goatherd trade compliments before Thyrsis sings.

❧

MAY 14 · READING 135

To sum the whole: whatever is useful or needful lies easily within man's reach; but he keeps his homage for what is astounding.

Longinus, On the Sublime, chapter XXXV, section 4; translated by H. L. Havell
The treatise On the Sublime, addressed to a friend named Terentian, explains why we admire the Nile and the Ocean more than a useful little stream.

❧

MAY 15 · READING 136

A vine, with downy leaves and clustering grapes, / Crept over all the cavern rock. Four springs / Poured forth their glittering waters in a row, / And here and there went wandering side by side. / Around were meadows of soft green, o'ergrown / With violets and parsley. 'Twas a spot / Where even an immortal might awhile / Linger, and gaze with wonder and delight.

Homer, Odyssey, Book V; translated by William Cullen Bryant
Mercury, sent by Jupiter to order Ulysses' release, reaches the island cave of the nymph Calypso and stops to admire it.

❧

MAY 16 · READING 137

It was a thing of awe whether for deathless gods or mortal men to see: from its root grew a hundred blooms, and it smelled most sweetly, so that all wide heaven above and the whole earth and the sea's salt swell laughed for joy.

Homeric Hymns, To Demeter, lines 4–18; translated by Hugh G. Evelyn-White

Demeter's daughter, picking flowers in a meadow, reaches for a narcissus that Earth has grown as a snare, and Aidoneus carries her away.

❧

MAY 17 · READING 138

When the Pleiades, daughters of Atlas, are rising, begin your harvest, and your ploughing when they are going to set.

Hesiod, Works and Days, lines 383–404; translated by Hugh G. Evelyn-White

The rising and setting of the Pleiades, a cluster of stars, told Greek farmers when to reap and when to plough.

MAY 18 · READING 139

And when the Muses came and song appeared they were ravished with delight; and singing always, never thought of eating and drinking, until at last in their forgetfulness they died. And now they live again in the grasshoppers; and this is the return which the Muses make to them—they neither hunger, nor thirst, but from the hour of their birth are always singing, and never eating or drinking; and when they die they go and inform the Muses in heaven who honours them on earth.

Plato, Phaedrus, Socrates; translated by Benjamin Jowett
At midday by the river, with grasshoppers singing overhead, Socrates tells Phaedrus why they should keep talking and not doze off.

MAY 19 · READING 140

How apt is the spirit of man to take precautions against hunger and thirst, cold and heat, to alleviate disease and foster strength! how suited to labour with a view to learning! how capable of garnering in the storehouse of his memory all that he has heard or seen or understood!

Xenophon, Memorabilia, Book I, chapter IV, Socrates; translated by H. G. Dakyns
Socrates talks with Aristodemus, a man who neither sacrificed nor prayed, about the gifts that set human beings apart.

❧

MAY 20 · READING 141

For what else can I do, a lame old man, than sing hymns to God? If then I was a nightingale, I would do the part of a nightingale; if I were a swan, I would do like a swan.

Epictetus, Discourses, Book I, chapter XVI; translated by George Long
In a chapter on providence, Epictetus says that praising God for the gifts of nature is his own work as a reasoning creature.

❧

MAY 21 · READING 142

So we should not overlook, but take account of everyday blessings, and rejoice that we live, and are well, and see the sun, and that no war or sedition plagues our country, but that the earth is open to cultivation, the sea secure to mariners, and that we can speak or be silent, lead a busy or an idle life, as we choose.

Plutarch, Morals, On Contentedness of Mind, section IX; translated by Arthur Richard Shilleto
Plutarch advises his friend to count the ordinary blessings that are easy to forget.

❧

MAY 22 · READING 143

O queenly Muse, our mother, hitherward come, I pray, / When the holy Moon brings round the Nemean festal day, / To Aegina the guest-thronged Dorian isle.

Pindar, Nemean Odes, Nemean III, strophe 1; translated by Arthur S. Way

Pindar summons the Muse to Aegina for Aristokleides, a victor at the Nemean Games, whose anniversary the ode was written to honor.

❧

MAY 23 · READING 144

Come, goddess of Cyprus, and in golden cups serve nectar delicately mixed with delights.

Sappho, Fragments, fragment 5; translated by Henry Thornton Wharton

Athenaeus, writing about 230 A.D., quotes these lines to show how poets called on Aphrodite when they drank.

❧

MAY 24 · READING 145

Cicala to cicala is dear, and ant to ant, and hawks to hawks, but to me the Muse and song. Of song may all my dwelling be full, for sleep is not more sweet, nor sudden spring, nor flowers are more delicious to the bees—so dear to me are the Muses.

Theocritus, Idyls, Idyl IX; translated by Andrew Lang

Two herdsmen have sung against each other for a prize; the poet ends the idyl with this verse of his own.

❧

MAY 25 · READING 146

A tear the Paphian sheds for each blood-drop of Adonis, and tears and blood on the earth are turned to flowers. The blood brings forth the rose, the tears, the wind-flower.

Bion, Lament for Adonis, The Lament for Adonis; translated by Andrew Lang

Bion's dirge for Adonis, the young hunter loved by Aphrodite and killed by a boar; Lang thought it was written for the spring festival of Adonis.

❧

MAY 26 · READING 147

It is natural to us to feel our souls lifted up by the true Sublime, and conceiving a sort of generous exultation to be filled with joy and pride, as though we had ourselves originated the ideas which we read.

Longinus, On the Sublime, chapter VII, section 2; translated by H. L. Havell

Longinus describes the joy of meeting true greatness on the page, which makes readers feel the thought is partly their own.

❧

May 27 · Reading 148

An olive-tree / With spreading branches at the farther end / Of that fair haven stands, and overbrows / A pleasant shady grotto of the nymphs / Called Naiads. Cups and jars of stone are ranged / Within, and bees lay up their honey there. / There from their spindles wrought of stone the nymphs / Weave their sea-purple robes, which all behold / With wonder; there are ever-flowing springs.

Homer, Odyssey, Book XIII; translated by William Cullen Bryant
The Phaeacian sailors bring Ulysses home to Ithaca at last, to the haven of Phorcys, where this cave lies.

❧

May 28 · Reading 149

And as many as had craving for the white drink, scratching the earth with the tips of their fingers, obtained abundance of milk; and from the ivy thyrsus sweet streams of honey dropped, so that, had you been present, beholding these things, you would have approached with prayers that God whom you now blame.

Euripides, The Bacchae, Messenger to Pentheus; translated by Theodore Alois Buckley
A herdsman reports to King Pentheus the wonders he saw among the women worshipping Dionysus on Mount Cithaeron.

❧

MAY 29 · READING 150

From Ida's top Hephaestus, lord of fire, / Sent forth his sign; and on, and ever on, / Beacon to beacon sped the courier-flame. / From Ida to the crag, that Hermes loves, / Of Lemnos; thence unto the steep sublime / Of Athos, throne of Zeus, the broad blaze flared.

Aeschylus, Agamemnon, Clytemnestra; translated by E. D. A. Morshead
Clytemnestra tells the chorus how a chain of beacon fires carried word of Troy's fall from Mount Ida to Argos in one night.

❧

MAY 30 · READING 151

And fed each morn by the pearly dew / The starred narcissi shine, / And a wreath with the crocus' golden hue / For the Mother and Daughter twine. / And never the sleepless fountains cease / That feed Cephisus' stream, / But they swell earth's bosom with quick increase, / And their wave hath a crystal gleam. / And the Muses' choir will never disdain / To visit this heaven-favoured plain, / Nor the Cyprian queen of the golden rein.

Sophocles, Oedipus at Colonus, choral song on Colonus; translated by F. Storr
The old men of Colonus sing the praises of their own village near Athens to the exile Oedipus.



MAY 31 · READING 152

Only at evening, as he returns from the chase, he sounds his note, playing sweet and low on his pipes of reed: not even she could excel him in melody—that bird who in flower-laden spring pouring forth her lament utters honey-voiced song amid the leaves.

Homeric Hymns, To Pan, lines 1–26; translated by Hugh G. Evelyn-White
Pan, the goat-footed shepherd god, roams the mountains all day hunting and comes home to play his pipes at nightfall.

June

June gathers readings on justice and law: what is fair between neighbors, why law is better than the will of one man, and what happens to those who scorn the right. Some come from the plays, where justice is argued out in public.

JUNE 1 · READING 153

Then will they still be angry at our saying, that, until philosophers bear rule, States and individuals will have no rest from evil, nor will this our imaginary State ever be realized?

Plato, The Republic, Book VI, Socrates; translated by Benjamin Jowett
Socrates returns to his boldest claim, that cities will not be well ruled until philosophers hold power.

JUNE 2 · READING 154

Take fair measure from your neighbour and pay him back fairly with the same measure, or better, if you can; so that if you are in need afterwards, you may find him sure.

Hesiod, Works and Days, lines 342–351; translated by Hugh G. Evelyn-White
Hesiod's rule for borrowing and lending, a plain-spoken version of fair dealing.

❧

JUNE 3 · READING 155

Who spurns the shrine of Right, nor wealth nor power / Shall be to him a tower, / To guard him from the gulf: there lies his lot, / Where all things are forgot.

Aeschylus, Agamemnon, the Chorus; translated by E. D. A. Morshead
The old men of the chorus, told that Troy has fallen, sing of the ruin that waits for those who scorn justice.

❧

JUNE 4 · READING 156

Nor did I deem that thou, a mortal man, / Could'st by a breath annul and override / The immutable unwritten laws of Heaven.

Sophocles, Antigone, Antigone to Creon; translated by F. Storr
Antigone defends her burial of her brother: no king's decree can overrule the laws of the gods.

❧

JUNE 5 · READING 157

This is more noble, my son, to honor equality, which ever links friends with friends, and states with states, and allies with allies: for equality is sanctioned by law among men.

Euripides, The Phoenician Virgins, Jocasta to Eteocles; translated by Theodore Alois Buckley
Jocasta pleads with her son Eteocles, who will not share the rule of Thebes with his brother Polynices as they had agreed.

❧

JUNE 6 · READING 158

Thou seest how God strikes with thunderbolts the creatures which stand above the rest and suffers them not to make a proud show; while those which are small do not provoke him to jealousy: thou seest also how he hurls his darts ever at those buildings which are the highest and those trees likewise; for God is wont to cut short all those things which stand out above the rest.

Herodotus, Histories, Book VII, chapter 10; translated by G. C. Macaulay
Artabanus warns Xerxes against the invasion of Greece; the Greeks believed the gods humbled whatever grew too proud.

❧

JUNE 7 · READING 159

Listen, then, he said; I proclaim that justice is nothing else than the interest of the stronger.

Plato, The Republic, Book I, Thrasymachus; translated by Benjamin Jowett
Thrasymachus the Sophist has lost patience with the slow questioning and offers his own blunt definition of justice.

❧

JUNE 8 · READING 160

How strange it is that mortals blame the gods / And say that we inflict the ills they bear, / When they, by their own folly and against / The will of fate, bring sorrow on themselves!

Homer, Odyssey, Book I; translated by William Cullen Bryant
Jove, king of the gods, speaks to the other gods on Olympus at the start of the poem.

❧

June 9 · Reading 161

He does mischief to himself who does mischief to another, and evil planned harms the plotter most.

Hesiod, Works and Days, lines 265–266; translated by Hugh G. Evelyn-White

A two-line warning, set in a passage about crooked judges and the justice of Zeus.

❧

June 10 · Reading 162

From gilded halls, that hands polluted raise, / Right turns away with proud averted eyes, / And of the wealth, men stamp amiss with praise, / Heedless, to poorer, holier temples hies, / And to Fate's goal guides all, in its appointed wise.

Aeschylus, Agamemnon, the Chorus; translated by E. D. A. Morshead

The chorus sings that Right leaves the rich houses of the wicked for the homes of honest poor folk.

❧

June 11 · Reading 163

So true the word familiar in men's mouths, / A foe's gifts are no gifts and profit not.

Sophocles, Ajax, Ajax's speech on yielding; translated by F. Storr

Ajax holds the sword he once received from his enemy Hector, and quotes a saying about gifts from a foe.

❧

JUNE 12 · READING 164

Stay; precipitate haste has not justice; but slow counsels perform most deeds in wisdom.

Euripides, The Phoenician Virgins, Jocasta; translated by Theodore Alois Buckley

Jocasta tries to slow her quarreling sons before their dispute turns into war.

❧

JUNE 13 · READING 165

Thus then these things are established by usage, and I think that Pindar spoke rightly in his verse, when he said that "of all things law is king."

Herodotus, Histories, Book III, chapter 38; translated by G. C. Macaulay

Herodotus has told how Greeks and Indians were horrified by each other's funeral customs; every people, he concludes, thinks its own ways best.

❧

JUNE 14 · READING 166

For I certainly think that I and you and every man do really believe, that to do is a greater evil than to suffer injustice: and not to be punished than to be punished.

Plato, Gorgias, Socrates to Polus; translated by Benjamin Jowett

Polus has said that no one would agree with Socrates; Socrates answers that he needs only one witness, the man he is arguing with.

❧

June 15 · Reading 167

Aristeides was surprised, and asked him whether Aristeides had ever done him any harm. "No," answered the man, "nor do I know him by sight, but I am tired of always hearing him called 'The Just.'" When Aristeides heard this he made no answer, but wrote his name on the man's shell and gave it back to him.

Plutarch, Lives, Life of Aristeides, chapter VII; translated by Aubrey Stewart

On the day Athens voted on banishing Aristeides, called the Just, a voter who could not write handed him his shell to write a name on.

❧

June 16 · Reading 168

Impossible is it,—impossible, Athenians,—to acquire a solid power by injustice and perjury and falsehood.

Demosthenes, Second Olynthiac, the speech on aid for Olynthus; translated by Charles Rann Kennedy

Arguing that Athens should help Olynthus, Demosthenes tells the assembly that Philip's power, built on broken faith, cannot last.

❧

June 17 · Reading 169

And he used to say that the wise man would regulate his conduct as a citizen, not according to the established laws of the state but according to the law of virtue.

Diogenes Laertius, Lives of Eminent Philosophers, Book VI, Antisthenes; translated by C. D. Yonge

Antisthenes sets the law of virtue above the laws of the state.

❧

JUNE 18 · READING 170

The great gods are never pleased / With violent deeds; they honor equity / And justice.

Homer, Odyssey, Book XIV; translated by William Cullen Bryant
Eumaeus speaks of the suitors who are feasting on his absent master's herds, and of the vengeance the gods send on violence.

❧

JUNE 19 · READING 171

For the son of Cronos has ordained this law for men, that fishes and beasts and winged fowls should devour one another, for right is not in them; but to mankind he gave right which proves far the best.

Hesiod, Works and Days, lines 274–285; translated by Hugh G. Evelyn-White
Hesiod tells his brother that a sense of right, or justice, is what sets human beings apart from fish, beasts and birds.

❧

JUNE 20 · READING 172

Lead her within, but gently: God on high / Looks graciously on him whom triumph's hour / Has made not pitiless.

Aeschylus, Agamemnon, Agamemnon's speech of return; translated by E. D. A. Morshead
Agamemnon, home from Troy, asks that the captive he has brought with him, the Trojan princess Cassandra, be treated gently.

❧

JUNE 21 · READING 173

Thou wilt learn in time / The truth, for time alone reveals the just; / A villain is detected in a day.

Sophocles, Oedipus the King, Creon to Oedipus; translated by F. Storr
Oedipus accuses his brother-in-law Creon of plotting against him; Creon asks to be judged only after the facts are known.

❧

JUNE 22 · READING 174

This has long since been my established opinion, the just man is born for his neighbors; but he who has a mind bent upon gain is both useless to the city and disagreeable to deal with, but best for himself.

Euripides, The Heraclidae, Iolaus; translated by Theodore Alois Buckley
Iolaus, old companion of Heracles, protects the hero's children, who are refused shelter wherever they go for fear of Argos.

❧

JUNE 23 · READING 175

On the other hand the rule of many has first a name attaching to it which is the fairest of all names, that is to say 'Equality'; next, the multitude does none of those things which the monarch does: offices of state are exercised by lot, and the magistrates are compelled to render account of their action: and finally all matters of deliberation are referred to the public assembly.

Herodotus, Histories, Book III, chapter 80; translated by G. C. Macaulay
After the rule of the Magians is overthrown, the Persian nobles who rose against them debate how Persia should be governed; Otanes speaks for the rule of the many.

❧

JUNE 24 · READING 176

Further, we affirmed that justice was doing one's own business, and not being a busybody; we said so again and again, and many others have said the same to us.

Plato, The Republic, Book IV, Socrates; translated by Benjamin Jowett
Socrates and Glaucon, looking for justice in the city they have imagined, recall a rule they laid down at its founding.

❧

JUNE 25 · READING 177

I have often before now been convinced that a democracy is incapable of empire, and never more so than by your present change of mind in the matter of Mitylene.

Thucydides, History of the Peloponnesian War, Book III, chapter IX, Cleon; translated by Richard Crawley
Athens has voted to put the men of rebellious Mitylene to death and then begun to regret it; Cleon argues against changing the decision.

❧

JUNE 26 · READING 178

Know you not that a good man does nothing for the sake of appearance, but for the sake of doing right?

Epictetus, Discourses, Book III, chapter XXIV; translated by George Long
Epictetus asks a pupil why he wants to be seen doing good, rather than simply doing it.

❧

JUNE 27 · READING 179

Anacharsis, when he discovered this, laughed at Solon's undertaking, if he thought to restrain the crimes and greed of the citizens by written laws, which he said were just like spiders' webs; for, like them, they caught the weaker criminals, but were broken through by the stronger and more important.

Plutarch, Lives, Life of Solon, chapter V; translated by Aubrey Stewart
Anacharsis, a wise man from Scythia, visited Solon at Athens while Solon was composing his laws.

❧

JUNE 28 · READING 180

As the sweet-apple blushes on the end of the bough, the very end of the bough, which the gatherers overlooked, nay overlooked not but could not reach.

Sappho, Fragments, fragment 93; translated by Henry Thornton Wharton
Wharton notes that later grammarians quoted this fragment to explain the Greek word for a sweet-apple, an apple grafted on a quince.

❧

JUNE 29 · READING 181

As a house, a ship, or the like, ought to have the lower parts firmest, so in human conduct, I ween, the principle and foundation should be just and true.

Demosthenes, Second Olynthiac, the speech on aid for Olynthus; translated by Charles Rann Kennedy
In the same speech, Demosthenes compares honest dealing to the lowest timbers of a house or a ship, the part that has to be strongest.

❧

JUNE 30 · READING 182

Moreover, he who would place the supreme power in mind, would place it in God and the laws; but he who entrusts man with it, gives it to a wild beast, for such his appetites sometimes make him; for passion influences those who are in power, even the very best of men: for which reason law is reason without desire.

Aristotle, Politics, Book III, chapter XVI; translated by William Ellis
Aristotle weighs whether a city is better ruled by its best man or by its laws.

July

July is given to the city and to freedom. The Greeks thought hard about how free people should govern themselves, and these readings range from the speeches of statesmen to the plain words of exiles who had lost the right to speak.

JULY 1 · READING 183

For no one is so senseless as to choose of his own will war rather peace, since in peace the sons bury their fathers, but in war the fathers bury their sons.

Herodotus, Histories, Book I, chapter 87; translated by G. C. Macaulay
Croesus, king of Lydia, defeated and taken prisoner by Cyrus of Persia, explains to his conqueror why he ever went to war.

JULY 2 · READING 184

To describe their character in a word, one might truly say that they were born into the world to take no rest themselves and to give none to others.

Thucydides, History of the Peloponnesian War, Book I, chapter III, the Corinthians; translated by Richard Crawley
At a congress in Sparta, envoys from Corinth urge the Spartans to war by describing their restless rivals, the Athenians.

❧

JULY 3 · READING 185

So also the Lacedaemonians are not inferior to any men when fighting one by one, and they are the best of all men when fighting in a body: for though free, yet they are not free in all things, for over them is set Law as a master, whom they fear much more even than thy people fear thee.

Herodotus, Histories, Book VII, chapter 104; translated by G. C. Macaulay
Demaratus, an exiled king of Sparta traveling with the Persian army, tells Xerxes why the Spartans will fight against any odds.

❧

JULY 4 · READING 186

Alas! no mortal is there who is free. For either he is the slave of money or of fortune; or the populace of the city or the dictates of the law constrain him to adopt manners not accordant with his natural inclinations.

Euripides, Hecuba, Hecuba to Agamemnon; translated by Theodore Alois Buckley
Hecuba, once queen of Troy and now a captive, has asked Agamemnon for justice; when he answers that he fears what the army will say, she replies.

❧

July 5 · Reading 187

As it is however, if a man should say that the Athenians proved to be the saviours of Hellas, he would not fail to hit the truth; for to whichever side these turned, to that the balance was likely to incline: and these were they who, preferring that Hellas should continue to exist in freedom, roused up all of Hellas which remained, so much, that is, as had not gone over to the Medes, and (after the gods at least) these were they who repelled the king.

Herodotus, Histories, Book VII, chapter 139; translated by G. C. Macaulay
Herodotus gives his own judgment on the Persian invasion, knowing that many Greeks of his day would not like it.

❧

July 6 · Reading 188

The Athenians have allies as numerous as our own, and allies that pay tribute, and war is a matter not so much of arms as of money, which makes arms of use.

Thucydides, History of the Peloponnesian War, Book I, chapter III, Archidamus; translated by Richard Crawley
Archidamus, king of Sparta, advises his people not to rush into war with Athens.

❧

JULY 7 · READING 189

And when some citizens of Amphipolis came to Lacedaemon, and went to see the mother of Brasidas, Argileonis, she asked them whether Brasidas died bravely and worthily of Sparta. When they praised him to excess, and said that he had not left his like behind, she said, "Say not so, strangers; Brasidas was a noble and a gallant man, but Sparta has many better than he."

Plutarch, Lives, Life of Lykurgus, chapter XXIV; translated by Aubrey Stewart

Brasidas, a Spartan general, had died fighting at Amphipolis; Plutarch tells how his mother received the news.

❧

JULY 8 · READING 190

What do ye desire? Freedom. Then see ye not that Philip's very titles are at variance therewith? Every king and despot is a foe to freedom, an antagonist to laws.

Demosthenes, Second Philippic, Demosthenes recalling his words to the Messenians; translated by Charles Rann Kennedy

Sent on an embassy to Messene and Argos, Demosthenes warned the Peloponnesians against Philip's gifts and promises; here he repeats to the Athenians what he told them.

❧

JULY 9 · READING 191

And when Pericles offered to provide for him, and invited him to come to him, he said that he would not sell his freedom of speech.

Diogenes Laertius, Lives of Eminent Philosophers, Book II, Simon; translated by C. D. Yonge

Simon was an Athenian leather-cutter who wrote down what Socrates said in his workshop; here he turns down an offer of support from Pericles.

❧

JULY 10 · READING 192

O my friend, if we, / Leaving this war, could flee from age and death, / I should not here be fighting in the van, / Nor would I send thee to the glorious war / But now, since many are the modes of death / Impending o'er us, which no man can hope / To shun, let us press on and give renown / To other men, or win it for ourselves!"

Homer, Iliad, Book XII; translated by William Cullen Bryant

Sarpedon, a king of Lycia fighting for Troy, tells his friend Glaucus that men honored as kings must fight in the front rank.

❧

JULY 11 · READING 193

Therefore, O citizens, I bid ye bow / In awe to this command, *Let no man live / Uncurbed by law nor curbed by tyranny;* / Nor banish ye the monarchy of Awe / Beyond the walls; untouched by fear divine, / No man doth justice in the world of men.

Aeschylus, The Furies, Athena's speech founding the court; translated by E. D. A. Morshead
The goddess Athena founds a court of citizens on the Hill of Ares at Athens to try Orestes, and gives it this charge.

❧

JULY 12 · READING 194

A race of slaves is a mere nothing against a race that will not be slaves.

Euripides, Orestes, Pylades; translated by Theodore Alois Buckley
Pylades, planning a desperate attack inside the palace, scorns the slaves who guard it.

❧

JULY 13 · READING 195

The Athenians accordingly increased in power; and it is evident, not by one instance only but in every way, that Equality is an excellent thing, since the Athenians while they were ruled by despots were not better in war that any of those who dwelt about them, whereas after they had got rid of despots they became far the first.

Herodotus, Histories, Book V, chapter 78; translated by G. C. Macaulay
Herodotus explains the rise of Athens after its people drove out their tyrants.

❧

July 14 · Reading 196

O Solon, Solon, you Hellenes are never anything but children, and there is not an old man among you.

Plato, Timaeus, Critias, telling the story of Solon; translated by Benjamin Jowett

Critias tells how the Athenian lawgiver Solon visited the priests of Sais in Egypt and spoke of the most ancient things he knew; a very old priest answered him.

❧

July 15 · Reading 197

Since then a state can support the misfortunes of private citizens, while they cannot support hers, it is surely the duty of everyone to be forward in her defence, and not like you to be so confounded with your domestic afflictions as to give up all thoughts of the common safety, and to blame me for having counselled war and yourselves for having voted it.

Thucydides, History of the Peloponnesian War, Book II, chapter VII, Pericles; translated by Richard Crawley

The Athenians blame Pericles for the war and its sufferings; he answers that private fortunes depend on the city's safety.

❧

JULY 16 · READING 198

But better still said Socrates, that he was not an Athenian or Greek, but a citizen of the world (as a man might say he was a Rhodian or Corinthian), for he did not confine himself to Sunium, or Taenarum, or the Ceraunian mountains.

Plutarch, Morals, On Exile, section V; translated by Arthur Richard Shilleto

Plutarch writes to comfort a friend who has been exiled, arguing that no one country is a person's only home.

❧

JULY 17 · READING 199

There must be some cause, some good reason, why the Greeks were so eager for liberty then, and now are eager for servitude. There was something, men of Athens, something in the hearts of the multitude then, which there is not now, which overcame the wealth of Persia and maintained the freedom of Greece, and quailed not under any battle by land or sea; the loss whereof has ruined all, and thrown the affairs of Greece into confusion.

Demosthenes, Third Philippic, the speech against Philip; translated by Charles Rann Kennedy

Demosthenes asks why the Greeks, once eager for freedom, now accept servitude; his answer, which follows, is that taking bribes was once hated and is now forgiven.

❧

JULY 18 · READING 200

Hence it is evident that a city is a natural production, and that man is naturally a political animal, and that whosoever is naturally and not accidentally unfit for society, must be either inferior or superior to man: thus the man in Homer, who is reviled for being "without society, without law, without family." Such a one must naturally be of a quarrelsome disposition, and as solitary as the birds.

Aristotle, Politics, Book I, chapter II; translated by William Ellis
Aristotle traces the city back to the household and the village, and argues that the city grows out of human nature itself.

❧

JULY 19 · READING 201

The question was put to him what countryman he was, and he replied: "A Citizen of the world."

Diogenes Laertius, Lives of Eminent Philosophers, Book VI, Diogenes; translated by C. D. Yonge
Asked where he came from, Diogenes the Cynic, who had been driven out of his native Sinope, claims no single city as his own.

❧

JULY 20 · READING 202

For, when the master is no longer near, / The servants cease from their appointed tasks, / And on the day that one becomes a slave / The Thunderer, Jove, takes half his worth away."

Homer, Odyssey, Book XVII; translated by William Cullen Bryant
Eumaeus explains why Argus, the old hunting dog of Ulysses, now lies neglected on a dunghill.

❧

JULY 21 · READING 203

Who holds a power / But newly gained is ever stern of mood.

Aeschylus, Prometheus Bound, lines 36–37, Hephaestus; translated by E. H. Plumptre

Hephaestus, ordered to chain Prometheus to a rock, explains why the new ruler of the gods, Zeus, shows no mercy.

❧

JULY 22 · READING 204

A State for one man is no State at all.

Sophocles, Antigone, Haemon to Creon; translated by F. Storr

Haemon pleads with his father Creon to listen to the people of Thebes, who pity Antigone.

❧

JULY 23 · READING 205

One thing, and that the greatest, not to have the liberty of speaking.

Euripides, The Phoenician Virgins, Polynices to Jocasta; translated by Theodore Alois Buckley

Polynices, exiled from Thebes by his brother, answers his mother Jocasta when she asks what is hardest for an exile.

❧

JULY 24 · READING 206

Then, as Timodemos continued ceaselessly to repeat this, Themistocles said: "I tell thee thus it is:—if I had been a native of Belbina I should never have been thus honoured by the Spartans; but neither wouldest thou, my friend, for all that thou art an Athenian."

Herodotus, Histories, Book VIII, chapter 125; translated by G. C. Macaulay

Themistocles had been honored at Sparta, and an Athenian named Timodemos kept saying the honor was really paid to Athens.

❧

JULY 25 · READING 207

Until philosophers are kings, or the kings and princes of this world have the spirit and power of philosophy, and political greatness and wisdom meet in one, and those commoner natures who pursue either to the exclusion of the other are compelled to stand aside, cities will never have rest from their evils—nor the human race, as I believe—and then only will this our State have a possibility of life and behold the light of day.

Plato, The Republic, Book V, Socrates; translated by Benjamin Jowett

Asked whether the just city he has described could ever exist, Socrates names the one change that would make it possible.

❧

JULY 26 · READING 208

Men make the city and not walls or ships without men in them.

Thucydides, History of the Peloponnesian War, Book VII, chapter XXIII, Nicias; translated by Richard Crawley
Beaten at Syracuse, the Athenian general Nicias speaks to his army as it begins a desperate retreat by land.

❧

JULY 27 · READING 209

Man, what are you talking about? Me in chains? You may fetter my leg, but my will not even Zeus himself can overpower.

Epictetus, Discourses, Book I, chapter I; translated by George Long
Epictetus imagines a tyrant threatening a philosopher with chains, and gives the philosopher's answer.

❧

JULY 28 · READING 210

To this Solon answered, that men keep covenants, because it is to the advantage of neither party to break them; and that he so suited his laws to his countrymen, that it was to the advantage of every one to abide by them rather than to break them. Nevertheless, things turned out more as Anacharsis thought than as Solon wished. Anacharsis said too, when present at an assembly of the people, that he was surprised to see that in Greece wise men spoke upon public affairs, and ignorant men decided them.

Plutarch, Lives, Life of Solon, chapter V; translated by Aubrey Stewart
Solon replies to Anacharsis, who had laughed at the idea of restraining crime by written laws.

❧

JULY 29 · READING 211

Nay, sweet to me is sleep beneath the broad-leaved plane-tree; let me love to listen to the murmur of the brook hard by, soothing, not troubling the husbandman with its sound.

Moschus, Idyls, Idyl V; translated by Andrew Lang
Moschus contrasts the fisherman's hard life on the sea with rest on land when the waves rage high.

❧

JULY 30 · READING 212

First, let us prepare for our own defense; provide ourselves, I mean, with ships, money, and troops—for surely, though all other people consented to be slaves, we at least ought to struggle for freedom.

Demosthenes, Third Philippic, the resolution at the close; translated by Charles Rann Kennedy
Closing the Third Philippic, Demosthenes moves that Athens arm first, then send envoys across Greece to gather allies against Philip.

❧

JULY 31 · READING 213

But it is a great recommendation to know how to command as well as to obey; and to do both these things well is the virtue of an accomplished citizen.

Aristotle, Politics, Book III, chapter IV; translated by William Ellis
Aristotle asks whether the virtue of a good man and the virtue of a good citizen are the same thing.

August

August holds fortune and change: the turn of luck that raises one man and throws down another, the brevity of human hopes, and the steadiness that can be kept through both.

AUGUST 1 · READING 214

Yet well in my undoubting mind I know / The day shall come in which our sacred Troy, / And Priam, and the people over whom / Spear-bearing Priam rules, shall perish all.

Homer, Iliad, Book VI; translated by William Cullen Bryant

In the same farewell, Hector tells Andromache that he expects Troy to fall, and fights on all the same.

AUGUST 2 · READING 215

Alone, alone, I deem far otherwise; / Not bliss nor wealth it is, but impious deed, / From which that after-growth of ill doth rise!

Aeschylus, Agamemnon, the Chorus; translated by E. D. A. Morshead

Against the old saying that great good fortune by itself brings ruin, the chorus insists that it is wrongdoing that breeds more wrong.

❧

AUGUST 3 · READING 216

Thy fall, O Oedipus, thy piteous fall / Warns me none born of women blest to call.

Sophocles, Oedipus the King, choral song after the discovery; translated by F. Storr

The chorus sings after Oedipus has learned that he killed his father and married his mother.

❧

AUGUST 4 · READING 217

If thou dost suppose that thou art immortal and that thou dost command an army which is also immortal, it will be of no use for me to declare to thee my judgment; but if thou hast perceived that thou art a mortal man thyself and dost command others who are so likewise, then learn this first, that for the affairs of men there is a revolving wheel, and that this in its revolution suffers not the same persons always to have good fortune.

Herodotus, Histories, Book I, chapter 207; translated by G. C. Macaulay

Croesus, now an adviser to Cyrus, gives him counsel before a campaign, drawing on his own fall from fortune.

❧

AUGUST 5 · READING 218

Peace, he replied; most gladly have I escaped the thing of which you speak; I feel as if I had escaped from a mad and furious master.

Plato, The Republic, Book I, Cephalus; translated by Benjamin Jowett

The old man Cephalus recalls hearing someone ask the poet Sophocles how love suited with age; this was the reply.

❧

AUGUST 6 · READING 219

For, as the strings of the bow and lyre are alternately tightened and relaxed, so is it with the order of the world; in human affairs there is nothing pure and without alloy.

Plutarch, Morals, On Contentedness of Mind, section XV; translated by Arthur Richard Shilleto

Plutarch argues that a contented mind looks to the bright side of things, since good and bad always come mixed.

❧

AUGUST 7 · READING 220

He used to say that men were wrong for complaining of fortune; for that they ask of the Gods what appear to be good things, not what are really so.

Diogenes Laertius, Lives of Eminent Philosophers, Book VI, Diogenes; translated by C. D. Yonge

Diogenes the Cynic, whose school taught that people should live simply and despise riches, mocks prayers for the wrong things.

❧

AUGUST 8 · READING 221

The gods ordain / The lot of man to suffer, while themselves / Are free from care. Beside Jove's threshold stand / Two casks of gifts for man. One cask contains / The evil, one the good, and he to whom / The Thunderer gives them mingled sometimes falls / Into misfortune, and is sometimes crowned / With blessings.

Homer, Iliad, Book XXIV; translated by William Cullen Bryant
Achilles, who has wept with Priam, the old king of Troy, explains to him how Jove deals out good and evil to mortals.

❧

AUGUST 9 · READING 222

Art is far weaker than Necessity.

Aeschylus, Prometheus Bound, line 522, Prometheus; translated by E. H. Plumptre
Prometheus, who gave fire and every craft to mortals, admits that no skill can overcome what must be.

❧

AUGUST 10 · READING 223

Dear son of Aegeus, to the gods alone / Is given immunity from eld and death; / But nothing else escapes all-ruinous time. / Earth's might decays, the might of men decays, / Honour grows cold, dishonour flourishes, / There is no constancy 'twixt friend and friend, / Or city and city; be it soon or late, / Sweet turns to bitter, hate once more to love.

Sophocles, Oedipus at Colonus, Oedipus to Theseus; translated by F. Storr
Old, blind and exiled, Oedipus warns Theseus, king of Athens and son of Aegeus, that time changes every friendship.

❧

AUGUST 11 · READING 224

Therefore lay to heart also the ancient saying, how well it has been said that at the first beginning of things the end does not completely appear.

Herodotus, Histories, Book VII, chapter 51; translated by G. C. Macaulay
Artabanus ends his counsel to Xerxes with an old saying about beginnings and ends.

❧

AUGUST 12 · READING 225

The truth is, Socrates, that these regrets, and also the complaints about relations, are to be attributed to the same cause, which is not old age, but men's characters and tempers; for he who is of a calm and happy nature will hardly feel the pressure of age, but to him who is of an opposite disposition youth and age are equally a burden.

Plato, The Republic, Book I, Cephalus; translated by Benjamin Jowett
Cephalus, a wealthy old man of the Piraeus, tells Socrates that old age is not the cause of old men's complaints.

❧

AUGUST 13 · READING 226

Hatred also is short-lived; but that which makes the splendour of the present and the glory of the future remains forever unforgotten.

Thucydides, History of the Peloponnesian War, Book II, chapter VII, Pericles; translated by Richard Crawley
In his last speech, after the plague and a second invasion, Pericles tells the angry Athenians not to fear being hated for their power.

❧

AUGUST 14 · READING 227

Show me a man who is sick and happy, in danger and happy, dying and happy, in exile and happy, in disgrace and happy.

Epictetus, Discourses, Book II, chapter XIX; translated by George Long
Epictetus scolds pupils who can repeat Stoic arguments but do not live by them.

❧

AUGUST 15 · READING 228

When Alexander heard from Anaxarchus of the infinite number of worlds, he wept, and when his friends asked him what was the matter, he replied, "Is it not a matter for tears that, when the number of worlds is infinite, I have not conquered one?"

Plutarch, Morals, On Contentedness of Mind, section IV; translated by Arthur Richard Shilleto
Plutarch contrasts Alexander's endless wants with the contentment of the poor philosopher Crates.

❧

AUGUST 16 · READING 229

When for right or for wrong hath been woven the tissue / Of our deeds, not Time the father of all can reverse the issue.

Pindar, Olympian Odes, Olympian II, epode 1; translated by Arthur S. Way
Pindar's victory odes often turn from the winner's triumph to the changes of fortune that no one can escape.

❧

AUGUST 17 · READING 230

To an envious man who was looking gloomy, he said: "I know not whether it is because some misfortune has happened to you, or some good fortune to someone else."

Diogenes Laertius, Lives of Eminent Philosophers, Book IV, Bion; translated by C. D. Yonge

Bion again, catching the envious man's secret: another person's luck can hurt as much as one's own bad luck.

❧

AUGUST 18 · READING 231

Was it that ye might share with human-kind / Their sorrows? for the race of mortal men / Of all that breathe and move upon the earth / Is the most wretched.

Homer, Iliad, Book XVII; translated by William Cullen Bryant

Jove, son of Saturn, pities the deathless horses of Achilles as they weep for their fallen charioteer.

❧

AUGUST 19 · READING 232

Only Hope remained there in an unbreakable home within under the rim of the great jar, and did not fly out at the door; for ere that, the lid of the jar stopped her, by the will of Aegis-holding Zeus who gathers the clouds.

Hesiod, Works and Days, lines 90–105; translated by Hugh G. Evelyn-White

The woman of the story, Pandora, has opened the great jar and let loose every ill on humankind; only Hope stays inside.

❧

AUGUST 20 · READING 233

Blind hopes I gave to live and dwell with them.

Aeschylus, Prometheus Bound, line 258, Prometheus; translated by E. H. Plumptre

Prometheus tells the chorus that he stopped mortals from foreseeing their deaths, and gave them blind hopes in place of that knowledge.

❧

AUGUST 21 · READING 234

Dead like the rest, for this in sooth is true: / War never slays an evil man by choice, / But still the good.

Sophocles, Philoctetes, Neoptolemus to Philoctetes; translated by F. Storr

Philoctetes, abandoned for years on a lonely island, asks for news of the Greeks at Troy; Neoptolemus tells him which of the best have died.

❧

AUGUST 22 · READING 235

It is a better thing to be sick, than to tend the sick: the one is a simple ill, but with the other is joined both pain of mind and toil of hands. But the whole life of men is full of grief, nor is there rest from toils.

Euripides, Hippolytus, the Nurse; translated by Theodore Alois Buckley

The old Nurse of Queen Phaedra, worn out by her mistress's mysterious illness, complains of the burdens of life.

❧

AUGUST 23 · READING 236

And these things which I say many of us Persians know well; yet we go with the rest being bound in the bonds of necessity: and the most hateful grief of all human griefs is this, to have knowledge of the truth but no power over the event.

Herodotus, Histories, Book IX, chapter 16; translated by G. C. Macaulay
At a feast in Thebes before the battle of Plataea, a Persian guest tells his Greek neighbor at table that he foresees disaster for his own army.

❧

AUGUST 24 · READING 237

May we not conceive each of us living beings to be a puppet of the Gods, either their plaything only, or created with a purpose—which of the two we cannot certainly know?

Plato, Laws, Book I, the Athenian; translated by Benjamin Jowett
The Athenian stranger offers an image of human beings and the passions that pull them.

❧

AUGUST 25 · READING 238

Indeed sensible men are prudent enough to treat their gains as precarious, just as they would also keep a clear head in adversity, and think that war, so far from staying within the limit to which a combatant may wish to confine it, will run the course that its chances prescribe; and thus, not being puffed up by confidence in military success, they are less likely to come to grief, and most ready to make peace, if they can, while their fortune lasts.

Thucydides, History of the Peloponnesian War, Book IV, chapter XII, the Spartan envoys; translated by Richard Crawley

With Spartan soldiers trapped on an island near Pylos, Sparta's envoys come to Athens to ask for peace.

❧

AUGUST 26 · READING 239

In that alone in which a man can confide, in that which is secure, in that which is not subject to hindrance, in that which cannot be taken away: that is, in your own will.

Epictetus, Discourses, Book III, chapter XXVI; translated by George Long

Epictetus speaks to those who fear poverty and ask what they can rely on.

❧

AUGUST 27 · READING 240

Time is like a river made up of the events which happen, and a violent stream; for as soon as a thing has been seen, it is carried away, and another comes in its place, and this will be carried away too.

Marcus Aurelius, Meditations, Book IV, section 45; translated by George Long

One of the short notes on change and passing time that run through Marcus' fourth book.

❧

AUGUST 28 · READING 241

For how can riches, or fame, or power at court help us to ease of mind or a calm life, unless we enjoy them when present, but are not for ever pining after them when absent?

Plutarch, Morals, On Contentedness of Mind, section I; translated by Arthur Richard Shilleto

Near the start of his letter to Paccius, Plutarch says that peace of mind comes from reason, not from good fortune.

❧

AUGUST 29 · READING 242

But time with its onward-rolling days bringeth change upon change: unscarred, unpained / Are none but the Gods' seed evermore.

Pindar, Isthmian Odes, Isthmian III, epode; translated by Arthur S. Way

Pindar recalls that even a great family, rich and victorious, has known reverses.

❧

AUGUST 30 · READING 243

All breathed the scent of the opulent summer, of the season of fruits; pears at our feet and apples by our sides were rolling plentiful, the tender branches, with wild plums laden, were earthward bowed, and the four-year-old pitch seal was loosened from the mouth of the wine-jars.

Theocritus, Idyls, Idyl VII; translated by Andrew Lang
The poet and two friends reach a harvest feast in an orchard on the island of Cos, where the first fruits are offered to Demeter.

❧

AUGUST 31 · READING 244

The Hope hovers almost within reach, and just when a man thinks he is going to catch it, off it flies, and leaves him gaping—like Tantalus in the water, you know.

Lucian, Charon, Hermes to Charon; translated by H. W. and F. G. Fowler
Hermes points out to Charon the Hopes and Fears that fly above the crowds of men.

September

September, the month when schools begin, is for learning and teaching. Teachers, students and critics speak of how the mind is trained, why imitation and wonder start us learning, and how slowly real knowledge comes.

SEPTEMBER 1 · READING 245

Being asked in what educated men differed from those who were illiterate, he said: "In good hopes."

Diogenes Laertius, Lives of Eminent Philosophers, Book I, Chilo; translated by C. D. Yonge

Chilo the Lacedaemonian, that is, the Spartan, was another of the wise men; Diogenes keeps his answers in short question-and-reply form.

SEPTEMBER 2 · READING 246

I see, my dear Theaetetus, that Theodorus had a true insight into your nature when he said that you were a philosopher, for wonder is the feeling of a philosopher, and philosophy begins in wonder.

Plato, Theaetetus, Socrates to Theaetetus; translated by Benjamin Jowett

The young Theaetetus has just admitted that a puzzle about size and number leaves him amazed; Socrates welcomes the feeling.

❧

SEPTEMBER 3 · READING 247

It was a saying of his that the roots of education were bitter, but the fruit sweet.

Diogenes Laertius, Lives of Eminent Philosophers, Book V, Aristotle; translated by C. D. Yonge

Diogenes gathers a string of Aristotle's sayings in his Life of the philosopher; this one is about the cost and the reward of learning.

❧

SEPTEMBER 4 · READING 248

It would seem, Adeimantus, that the direction in which education starts a man, will determine his future life.

Plato, The Republic, Book IV, Socrates; translated by Benjamin Jowett

Socrates and Adeimantus agree that once education is right, a city's rulers can leave many small rules to its citizens.

❧

SEPTEMBER 5 · READING 249

"Abundant learning does not form the mind; for if it did, it would have instructed Hesiod, and Pythagoras, and likewise Xenophanes, and Hecataeus.

Diogenes Laertius, Lives of Eminent Philosophers, Book IX, Heraclitus; translated by C. D. Yonge

Diogenes quotes this line of Heraclitus as proof of his proud spirit; it names earlier poets and thinkers who knew much and, in his view, understood little.

❧

SEPTEMBER 6 · READING 250

But then, if I am right, certain professors of education must be wrong when they say that they can put a knowledge into the soul which was not there before, like sight into blind eyes.

Plato, The Republic, Book VII, Socrates; translated by Benjamin Jowett
After the image of the cave, Socrates argues that education turns the soul toward the light rather than filling it.

❧

SEPTEMBER 7 · READING 251

He used to say that education was for the young sobriety, for the old comfort, for the poor riches, and for the rich an ornament.

Diogenes Laertius, Lives of Eminent Philosophers, Book VI, Diogenes; translated by C. D. Yonge
A gentle saying from Diogenes the Cynic, most of whose recorded sayings are jokes and rebukes.

❧

SEPTEMBER 8 · READING 252

It was for the sake of others that I first undertook to write biographies, but I soon began to dwell upon and delight in them for myself, endeavouring to the best of my ability to regulate my own life, and to make it like that of those who were reflected in their history as it were in a mirror before me.

Plutarch, Lives, Life of Timoleon, opening; translated by Aubrey Stewart
Plutarch explains why he wrote his paired biographies of famous Greeks and Romans.

❧

SEPTEMBER 9 · READING 253

He said that a rich but ignorant man was like a sheep with a golden fleece.

Diogenes Laertius, Lives of Eminent Philosophers, Book VI, Diogenes; translated by C. D. Yonge
Diogenes the Cynic, who begged for his living, often weighed wealth against learning and virtue.

❧

SEPTEMBER 10 · READING 254

O ponder this, my son. To err is common / To all men, but the man who having erred / Hugs not his errors, but repents and seeks / The cure, is not a wastrel nor unwise. / No fool, the saw goes, like the obstinate fool.

Sophocles, Antigone, Teiresias to Creon; translated by F. Storr
The blind prophet Teiresias warns Creon that the gods are angry and begs him to change his mind while there is time.

❧

SEPTEMBER 11 · READING 255

My son, Eteocles, not every ill is added to age, but experience has it in its power to evince more wisdom than youth.

Euripides, The Phoenician Virgins, Jocasta to Eteocles; translated by Theodore Alois Buckley
The mother of two warring brothers claims the one advantage of growing old.

❧

SEPTEMBER 12 · READING 256

Then, my good friend, I said, do not use compulsion, but let early education be a sort of amusement; you will then be better able to find out the natural bent.

Plato, The Republic, Book VII, Socrates; translated by Benjamin Jowett
Socrates holds that knowledge forced on a learner does not stay in the mind.

❧

SEPTEMBER 13 · READING 257

It is with the workings of the soul as with those of the body; want of exercise of the organ leads to inability of function, here bodily, there spiritual, so that we can neither do the things that we should nor abstain from the things we should not.

Xenophon, Memorabilia, Book I, chapter II; translated by H. G. Dakyns
Xenophon, defending the memory of Socrates against the charge that he corrupted the young, argues that goodness must be kept in practice.

❧

SEPTEMBER 14 · READING 258

For it is impossible for a man to begin to learn that which he thinks that he knows.

Epictetus, Discourses, Book II, chapter XVII; translated by George Long
Epictetus says that the first business of anyone who studies philosophy is to throw away self-conceit.

❧

SEPTEMBER 15 · READING 259

Just as those colours whose blooming and pleasant hues refresh our sight are grateful to the eyes, so we ought by our studies to delight in that which is useful for our own lives; and this is to be found in the acts of good men, which when narrated incite us to imitate them.

Plutarch, Lives, Life of Perikles, chapter I; translated by Aubrey Stewart
Plutarch explains why he writes the lives of good men: the mind should be fed on what improves it.

❧

SEPTEMBER 16 · READING 260

First, the instinct of imitation is implanted in man from childhood, one difference between him and other animals being that he is the most imitative of living creatures, and through imitation learns his earliest lessons; and no less universal is the pleasure felt in things imitated.

Aristotle, Poetics, chapter IV; translated by S. H. Butcher
Aristotle begins his account of where poetry comes from with two causes deep in human nature.

❧

SEPTEMBER 17 · READING 261

Therefore even the whole world is not wide enough for the soaring range of human thought, but man's mind often overleaps the very bounds of space. When we survey the whole circle of life, and see it abounding everywhere in what is elegant, grand, and beautiful, we learn at once what is the true end of man's being.

Longinus, On the Sublime, chapter XXXV, section 3; translated by H. L. Havell

Longinus has just said that nature brought us into the world as spectators and rivals of her mighty works, and planted in us a yearning for what is great.

❧

SEPTEMBER 18 · READING 262

He went once into a school and saw many statues of the Muses, but very few pupils, and said: "Gods, and all my good schoolmasters, you have plenty of pupils."

Diogenes Laertius, Lives of Eminent Philosophers, Book VI, Diogenes; translated by C. D. Yonge

In a school full of statues of the Muses but nearly empty of students, Diogenes the Cynic congratulates the gods on their pupils.

❧

SEPTEMBER 19 · READING 263

Think not for thyself to claim / All gifts at once. On one the god bestows / Prowess in war, upon another grace / In dance, upon another skill to touch / The harp and sing. In yet another, Jove / The Thunderer implants the prudent mind, / By which the many profit, and by which / Communities are saved; and well doth he / Who hath it know its worth.

Homer, Iliad, Book XIII; translated by William Cullen Bryant
Polydamas warns Hector that strength in war does not make him the wisest in council; Jove gives different gifts to different men.

❧

SEPTEMBER 20 · READING 264

'Tis Zeus alone who shows the perfect way / Of knowledge: He hath ruled, / Men shall learn wisdom, by affliction schooled.

Aeschylus, Agamemnon, the Chorus; translated by E. D. A. Morshead
The old men of Argos, waiting for news of the war at Troy, sing that Zeus has made suffering the teacher of wisdom.

❧

SEPTEMBER 21 · READING 265

Alas, alas, what misery to be wise / When wisdom profits nothing!

Sophocles, Oedipus the King, Teiresias; translated by F. Storr
Summoned by King Oedipus to name the cause of the plague on Thebes, the prophet Teiresias wishes he had not come.

❧

SEPTEMBER 22 · READING 266

But cleverness is not wisdom, nor is the thinking on things unfit for mortals.

Euripides, The Bacchae, the Chorus; translated by Theodore Alois Buckley
The women who follow Bacchus sing against the clever pride of Pentheus, who scorns the new god.

❧

SEPTEMBER 23 · READING 267

But that we shall be better and braver and less helpless if we think that we ought to enquire, than we should have been if we indulged in the idle fancy that there was no knowing and no use in seeking to know what we do not know;—that is a theme upon which I am ready to fight, in word and deed, to the utmost of my power.

Plato, Meno, Socrates to Meno; translated by Benjamin Jowett
Socrates has led a slave boy, step by step, to discover a truth of geometry, and draws this lesson from it.

❧

SEPTEMBER 24 · READING 268

The absence of romance in my history will, I fear, detract somewhat from its interest; but if it be judged useful by those inquirers who desire an exact knowledge of the past as an aid to the interpretation of the future, which in the course of human things must resemble if it does not reflect it, I shall be content. In fine, I have written my work, not as an essay which is to win the applause of the moment, but as a possession for all time.

Thucydides, History of the Peloponnesian War, Book I, chapter I; translated by Richard Crawley
Thucydides explains how he gathered his facts and what he hopes his history will be worth to later readers.

❧

SEPTEMBER 25 · READING 269

Nor was it less extravagant to go and consult the will of Heaven on any questions which it is given to us to decide by dint of learning.

Xenophon, Memorabilia, Book I, chapter I; translated by H. G. Dakyns
Xenophon explains Socrates' view of omens and oracles: they are for what lies beyond human judgment, not for what we can learn.

❧

SEPTEMBER 26 · READING 270

This is what Socrates knew, and yet he never said that he knew anything or taught anything.

Epictetus, Discourses, Book III, chapter V; translated by George Long
Epictetus describes the kind of life that Socrates knew how to live.

❧

SEPTEMBER 27 · READING 271

For natural ability without training is blind: and training without natural ability is defective, and practice without both natural ability and training is imperfect. For just as in farming the first requisite is good soil, next a good farmer, next good seed, so also here: the soil corresponds to natural ability, the training to the farmer, the seed to precepts and instruction.

Plutarch, Morals, On Education, section IV; translated by Arthur Richard Shilleto

Plutarch names three things that must meet for any excellence: natural ability, training and practice.

❧

SEPTEMBER 28 · READING 272

The cause of this again is, that to learn gives the liveliest pleasure, not only to philosophers but to men in general; whose capacity, however, of learning is more limited.

Aristotle, Poetics, chapter IV; translated by S. H. Butcher

Aristotle explains why we enjoy looking at faithful pictures even of things that are unpleasant to see in life.

❧

September 29 · Reading 273

Well may that man conceive an admiration of philosophy, who is a spectator of so much folly; well may he despise the gifts of Fortune, who views this stage, and its multitudinous actors. The slave grows to be master, the rich man is poor, the pauper becomes a prince, a king; and one is His Majesty's friend, and another is his enemy, and a third he banishes.

Lucian, Nigrinus, the narrator; translated by H. W. and F. G. Fowler
Lucian's narrator reports the words of the philosopher Nigrinus, who set the noise and folly of Rome against the peace of Athens.

❧

September 30 · Reading 274

In general we may regard those words as truly noble and sublime which always please and please all readers. For when the same book always produces the same impression on all who read it, whatever be the difference in their pursuits, their manner of life, their aspirations, their ages, or their language, such a harmony of opposites gives irresistible authority to their favourable verdict.

Longinus, On the Sublime, chapter VII, section 4; translated by H. L. Havell
Longinus offers a test of greatness in writing: what pleases readers of every age, way of life and language at once.

October

October takes up speech and silence. The Greeks prized eloquence but distrusted talk that did nothing, and these readings weigh the well-chosen word against the empty one, and the use of saying nothing at all.

OCTOBER 1 · READING 275

When some one was discoursing about matters useful in themselves at an unfitting time, King Leonidas said, "Stranger, you speak of what is wanted when it is not wanted." Charilaus the cousin of Lykurgus, when asked why they had so few laws answered, that men of few words required few laws. And Archidamidas, when some blamed Hekataeus the Sophist for having said nothing during dinner, answered, "He who knows how to speak knows when to speak also."

Plutarch, Lives, Life of Lykurgus, chapter XIX; translated by Aubrey Stewart

Plutarch collects sayings that show the Spartans' dislike of long speeches, a habit he traces to the training of Lykurgus the lawgiver.

OCTOBER 2 · READING 276

If in season due be thy speech, if blended / Into close-knit order thy thoughts be, as when / A weaver upgathers his threads, attended / Shall thy words be with scantier cavil of men.

Pindar, Pythian Odes, Pythian I, strophe 5; translated by Arthur S. Way

Near the end of an ode for Hiero, Pindar turns to advice for a ruler.

❧

October 3 · Reading 277

A young man was talking a great deal of nonsense, and he said to him: "This is the reason why we have two ears and only one mouth, that we may hear more and speak less."

Diogenes Laertius, Lives of Eminent Philosophers, Book VII, Zeno; translated by C. D. Yonge
Zeno of Citium, in Cyprus, was the teacher whose pupils were first called Stoics; Diogenes records this reply to a talkative young man.

❧

October 4 · Reading 278

Hateful to me, as are the gates of hell, / Is he who, hiding one thing in his heart, / Utters another.

Homer, Iliad, Book IX; translated by William Cullen Bryant
Achilles answers the envoys Agamemnon has sent to win him back to the war; before refusing them, he promises to speak plainly.

❧

October 5 · Reading 279

I am writing biography, not history; and often a man's most brilliant actions prove nothing as to his true character, while some trifling incident, some casual remark or jest, will throw more light upon what manner of man he was than the bloodiest battle, the greatest array of armies, or the most important siege.

Plutarch, Lives, Life of Alexander, chapter I; translated by Aubrey Stewart
Plutarch opens his Life of Alexander the Great by explaining what kind of book he is writing.

❧

October 6 · Reading 280

How light soe'er be the word that hath flitted / From thy lips, it is weighty, as coming from thee.

Pindar, Pythian Odes, Pythian I, antistrophe 5; translated by Arthur S. Way

Pindar continues his advice to Hiero: the words of a great man carry more weight than he may intend.

❧

October 7 · Reading 281

When he was asked what there was among men which was both good and bad, he replied: "The tongue."

Diogenes Laertius, Lives of Eminent Philosophers, Book I, Anacharsis; translated by C. D. Yonge

Anacharsis was a Scythian, a foreigner, whom some writers counted among the wise men; Diogenes gives him a Life in his first book.

❧

October 8 · Reading 282

Men's tongues are voluble, / And endless are the modes of speech, and far / Extends from side to side the field of words.

Homer, Iliad, Book XX; translated by William Cullen Bryant

Aeneas, facing Achilles in battle, mocks the trading of boasts and insults before the two heroes fight.

❧

October 9 · Reading 283

'Shepherds of the wilderness, wretched things of shame, mere bellies, we know how to speak many false things as though they were true; but we know, when we will, to utter true things.'

Hesiod, Theogony, lines 26–28; translated by Hugh G. Evelyn-White
Hesiod tells how the Muses met him while he was tending sheep on Mount Helicon and spoke these words before giving him the gift of song.

❧

October 10 · Reading 284

And in this instance, you who are the father of letters, from a paternal love of your own children have been led to attribute to them a quality which they cannot have; for this discovery of yours will create forgetfulness in the learners' souls, because they will not use their memories; they will trust to the external written characters and not remember of themselves.

Plato, Phaedrus, Socrates; translated by Benjamin Jowett
Socrates tells a story of Egypt: the god Theuth offers the king the gift of letters, and the king replies.

❧

October 11 · Reading 285

So little pains do the vulgar take in the investigation of truth, accepting readily the first story that comes to hand.

Thucydides, History of the Peloponnesian War, Book I, chapter I; translated by Richard Crawley
Thucydides has just corrected two common errors about Sparta that other Greeks repeated.

❧

October 12 · Reading 286

As bad tragic actors cannot sing alone, but in company with many: so some persons cannot walk about alone. Man, if you are anything, both walk alone and talk to yourself, and do not hide yourself in the chorus.

Epictetus, Discourses, Book III, chapter XIV; translated by George Long
One of a group of short miscellaneous sayings that Arrian gathered into a single chapter.

❧

October 13 · Reading 287

And so Antisthenes said well that those who wish to lead a good life ought to have genuine friends or red-hot enemies; for the former deterred you from what was wrong by reproof, the latter by abuse.

Plutarch, Morals, How a Man May Be Benefited by His Enemies, section VI; translated by Arthur Richard Shilleto
Plutarch argues that a sensible person can learn even from enemies, who are quick to point out faults.

❧

October 14 · Reading 288

Poetry, therefore, is a more philosophical and a higher thing than history: for poetry tends to express the universal, history the particular.

Aristotle, Poetics, chapter IX; translated by S. H. Butcher
Aristotle compares the poet with the historian: one tells what has happened, the other what may happen.

❧

October 15 · Reading 289

Man's speech shall long / Outlast his deeds, what words soe'er the tongue / Hath drawn up, by the Graces' kind control, / From wells of inspiration in the soul.

Pindar, Nemean Odes, Nemean IV, strophe 1; translated by Arthur S. Way
Pindar, whose craft was to make victories remembered, claims that words outlive the deeds they praise.

❧

October 16 · Reading 290

How, it may be asked, is this to be done? I have hinted elsewhere in my writings that sublimity is, so to say, the image of greatness of soul. Hence a thought in its naked simplicity, even though unuttered, is sometimes admirable by the sheer force of its sublimity; for instance, the silence of Ajax in the eleventh *Odyssey* is great, and grander than anything he could have said.

Longinus, On the Sublime, chapter IX, section 2; translated by H. L. Havell
The first source of grand writing, Longinus says, is a lofty cast of mind; his example is the silence of Ajax in the eleventh book of the Odyssey.

❧

October 17 · Reading 291

He used to say that a speech, the object of which was solely to please, was a honeyed halter.

Diogenes Laertius, Lives of Eminent Philosophers, Book VI, Diogenes; translated by C. D. Yonge
A halter is a rope for leading or hanging; Diogenes the Cynic warns against flattering speech.

❧

October 18 · Reading 292

One man to sight / Is undistinguished, but on him the gods / Bestow the power of words. All look on him / Gladly; he knows whereof he speaks; his speech / Is mild and modest; he is eminent / In all assemblies, and, whene'er he walks / The city, men regard him as a god.

Homer, Odyssey, Book VIII; translated by William Cullen Bryant
A handsome young Phaeacian has insulted Ulysses; he answers that the gods do not give looks and the power of words to the same man.

❧

October 19 · Reading 293

For it is through the Muses and far-shooting Apollo that there are singers and harpers upon the earth; but princes are of Zeus, and happy is he whom the Muses love: sweet flows speech from his mouth.

Hesiod, Theogony, lines 75–103; translated by Hugh G. Evelyn-White
The Theogony tells the birth of the gods; its opening hymn praises the Muses, the nine daughters of Zeus who give song and persuasive speech.

❧

OCTOBER 20 · READING 294

Home—but I say no more: upon my tongue / Treads hard the ox o' the adage.

Aeschylus, Agamemnon, the Watchman's opening speech; translated by E. D. A. Morshead

The Watchman on the palace roof has seen the beacon that means Troy has fallen; he hints at troubles in the house that he will not name.

❧

OCTOBER 21 · READING 295

When any wise man takes a good occasion for his speech, it is not a great task to speak well; but you have a rapid tongue, as if wise, but in your words there is no wisdom; but a powerful man, when bold, and able to speak, is a bad citizen if he has not sense.

Euripides, The Bacchae, Teiresias to Pentheus; translated by Theodore Alois Buckley

The old prophet Teiresias rebukes young King Pentheus of Thebes, who is trying to drive out the worship of the god Bacchus.

❧

OCTOBER 22 · READING 296

The point which I should first wish to understand is whether the pious or holy is beloved by the gods because it is holy, or holy because it is beloved of the gods.

Plato, Euthyphro, Socrates to Euthyphro; translated by Benjamin Jowett

Euthyphro, who is prosecuting his own father, claims to know exactly what holiness is; Socrates asks him this question.

❧

October 23 · Reading 297

I think the two things most opposed to good counsel are haste and passion; haste usually goes hand in hand with folly, passion with coarseness and narrowness of mind.

Thucydides, History of the Peloponnesian War, Book III, chapter IX, Diodotus; translated by Richard Crawley
Diodotus answers Cleon in the second debate on Mitylene and defends the Athenians' right to think again.

❧

October 24 · Reading 298

Without self-restraint who can lay any good lesson to heart or practise it when learnt in any degree worth speaking of?

Xenophon, Memorabilia, Book I, chapter V, Socrates; translated by H. G. Dakyns
Xenophon reports Socrates' teaching that self-control is the foundation of every other virtue.

❧

October 25 · Reading 299

If you wish to be well spoken of, learn to speak well (of others): and when you have learned to speak well of them, try to act well, and so you will reap the fruit of being well spoken of.

Epictetus, Fragments, Fragment VII; translated by George Long
A saying from the fragments, on reputation and the speech that earns it.

❧

October 26 · Reading 300

Hiero was twitted by one of his enemies for his foul breath, so he went home and said to his wife, "How is this? You never told me of it." But she being chaste and innocent replied, "I thought all men's breath was like that."

Plutarch, Morals, How a Man May Be Benefited by His Enemies, section VII; translated by Arthur Richard Shilleto

Plutarch tells this story of Hiero, ruler of Syracuse, to show that enemies notice what friends will not mention.

❧

October 27 · Reading 301

But the greatest thing by far is to have a command of metaphor. This alone cannot be imparted by another; it is the mark of genius, for to make good metaphors implies an eye for resemblances.

Aristotle, Poetics, chapter XXII; translated by S. H. Butcher

Aristotle closes his advice on poetic diction, on the right mixture of plain and unusual words.

❧

October 28 · Reading 302

Yea, and often the keeping / Of silence bringeth a richer reaping / Of joy, seeing Envy is balked of her prey.

Pindar, Isthmian Odes, Isthmian I, antistrophe 4; translated by Arthur S. Way

Pindar cuts short his list of a victor's many wins, giving a reason for saying no more.

❧

October 29 · Reading 303

When anger spreads through the breast, guard thy tongue from barking idly.

Sappho, Fragments, fragment 27; translated by Henry Thornton Wharton
A scrap of advice from a lost poem by Sappho, which Plutarch quotes in his essay on restraining anger.

❧

October 30 · Reading 304

All speech without action appears vain and idle, but especially that of our commonwealth; as the more we are thought to excel therein, the more is our speaking distrusted by all.

Demosthenes, Second Olynthiac, the speech on aid for Olynthus; translated by Charles Rann Kennedy
Olynthus, a city in the north threatened by Philip of Macedon, had asked Athens for help; Demosthenes urges that the envoys sent to Thessaly should carry deeds as well as speeches.

❧

October 31 · Reading 305

For those whose whole lives are wasted in paltry and illiberal thoughts and habits cannot possibly produce any work worthy of the lasting reverence of mankind. It is only natural that their words should be full of sublimity whose thoughts are full of majesty.

Longinus, On the Sublime, chapter IX, section 3; translated by H. L. Havell
Continuing his account of where grand writing comes from, Longinus ties great words to a generous and aspiring spirit.

November

November is a month for grief, death and memory. The readings are not all sad: beside laments and epitaphs stand the consolations of the philosophers and the poets' belief that song keeps the dead alive.

NOVEMBER 1 · READING 306

Like the race of leaves / Is that of humankind. Upon the ground / The winds strew one year's leaves; the sprouting grove / Puts forth another brood, that shoot and grow / In the spring season. So it is with man: / One generation grows while one decays.

Homer, Iliad, Book VI; translated by William Cullen Bryant
Glaucus, a Lycian fighting for Troy, meets the Greek Diomed in battle; asked who his ancestors were, he answers first with this picture of the generations.

NOVEMBER 2 · READING 307

Wherefore, O judges, be of good cheer about death, and know of a certainty, that no evil can happen to a good man, either in life or after death.

Plato, Apology, Socrates' last words to the court; translated by Benjamin Jowett
Condemned to death, Socrates speaks to the judges who voted to acquit him.

❧

NOVEMBER 3 · READING 308

For when another man has met / A greater grief than he—has lost, perchance, / A brother or a son—he dries at length / His tears, and ceases to lament; for fate / Bestows the power to suffer patiently.

Homer, Iliad, Book XXIV; translated by William Cullen Bryant
Apollo rebukes the other gods because Achilles, still mourning his friend Patroclus, will not stop his cruelty to the body of Hector.

❧

NOVEMBER 4 · READING 309

Men I think will remember us even hereafter.

Sappho, Fragments, fragment 32; translated by Henry Thornton Wharton
A line in which Sappho speaks of the lasting fame of her poems and her companions.

❧

NOVEMBER 5 · READING 310

Happier he / Than I; for I have borne what no man else / That dwells on earth could bear—have laid my lips / Upon the hand of him who slew my son."

Homer, Iliad, Book XXIV; translated by William Cullen Bryant
Priam has come by night to the tent of Achilles to beg for the body of his son Hector.

❧

November 6 · Reading 311

He used to say that the way to the shades below was easy; and accordingly, that people went there with their eyes shut.

Diogenes Laertius, Lives of Eminent Philosophers, Book IV, Bion; translated by C. D. Yonge
Bion, a native of the country around the Borysthenes, left many sharp sayings; the shades below are the dead in the underworld.

❧

November 7 · Reading 312

Noble Ulysses, speak not thus of death, / As if thou couldst console me. I would be / A laborer on earth, and serve for hire / Some man of mean estate, who makes scant cheer, / Rather than reign o'er all who have gone down / To death.

Homer, Odyssey, Book XI; translated by William Cullen Bryant
In the land of the dead Ulysses meets the shade of Achilles, the greatest warrior at Troy, who will not be consoled.

❧

November 8 · Reading 313

Not to be born at all / Is best, far best that can befall, / Next best, when born, with least delay / To trace the backward way.

Sophocles, Oedipus at Colonus, choral song on old age; translated by F. Storr
The old men of Colonus, looking at the aged and suffering Oedipus, sing the darkest lines in Greek tragedy on the burdens of a long life.

❧

NOVEMBER 9 · READING 314

For I deem that the true votary of philosophy is likely to be misunderstood by other men; they do not perceive that he is always pursuing death and dying; and if this be so, and he has had the desire of death all his life long, why when his time comes should he repine at that which he has been always pursuing and desiring?

Plato, Phaedo, Socrates; translated by Benjamin Jowett
On his last day in prison, Socrates explains to his friends Simmias and Cebes why he is not afraid to die.

❧

NOVEMBER 10 · READING 315

I must die. Must I then die lamenting? I must be put in chains. Must I then also lament?

Epictetus, Discourses, Book I, chapter I; translated by George Long
Epictetus, once a slave, teaches what a person should have ready when death, prison or exile threatens: knowing what is his own and what is not.

❧

NOVEMBER 11 · READING 316

What are we?—what not?—things in one day ending! / Man is a dream through shadows dimly seen. / But when a glory shines from God descending / Then rests on men a sunbright splendour-sheen / And life serene.

Pindar, Pythian Odes, Pythian VIII, epode 5; translated by Arthur S. Way

The close of an ode for a victor from the island of Aegina, which ends with a prayer for the island's freedom.

❧

NOVEMBER 12 · READING 317

For lamentation may not be in a poet's house: such things befit not us.

Sappho, Fragments, fragment 136; translated by Henry Thornton Wharton

The later writer Maximus of Tyre quotes this line, saying that Sappho spoke it to her daughter.

❧

NOVEMBER 13 · READING 318

We look at withered flowers, whose dye is gone from them, and what can we call them but unlovely things? Yet in the hour of their bloom these unlovely things were things of beauty.

Lucian, Dialogues of the Dead, dialogue XVIII, Hermes to Menippus; translated by H. W. and F. G. Fowler

In the underworld, the scoffer Menippus asks to be shown Helen of Troy, and Hermes points out her skull.

❧

NOVEMBER 14 · READING 319

"Death is nothing to us; for that which is dissolved is devoid of sensation, and that which is devoid of sensation is nothing to us."

Diogenes Laertius, Lives of Eminent Philosophers, Book X, Epicurus; translated by C. D. Yonge
Diogenes ends his work with Epicurus and quotes his letters and teachings; this one argues against the fear of death.

❧

NOVEMBER 15 · READING 320

He spake, and, entering that fair dwelling-place, / Passed through to where the illustrious suitors sat, / While over Argus the black night of death / Came suddenly as soon as he had seen / Ulysses, absent now for twenty years.

Homer, Odyssey, Book XVII; translated by William Cullen Bryant
Ulysses comes home disguised as a beggar; his old hound Argus, lying neglected by the gate, lifts his head and knows him.

❧

NOVEMBER 16 · READING 321

But blood of man once spilled, / Once at his feet shed forth, and darkening the plain,-- / Nor chant nor charm can call it back again.

Aeschylus, Agamemnon, the Chorus; translated by E. D. A. Morshead
With Agamemnon home and gone into the palace, the chorus is full of foreboding; a field may recover from famine, but a life once taken cannot return.

❧

NOVEMBER 17 · READING 322

What respite to my sorrows, what relief? / No tears, no moans, can satisfy such grief.

Sophocles, Electra, Electra; translated by F. Storr
Electra mourns her father Agamemnon, murdered by her mother, and refuses all comfort from the women of the chorus.

❧

NOVEMBER 18 · READING 323

Time will soften thy grief: he that is dead is nothing.

Euripides, Alcestis, Alcestis to Admetus; translated by Theodore Alois Buckley
Alcestis, who has agreed to die in place of her husband Admetus, comforts him as she dies.

❧

NOVEMBER 19 · READING 324

Yea, for after I had reckoned up, it came into my mind to feel pity at the thought how brief was the whole life of man, seeing that of these multitudes not one will be alive when a hundred years have gone by.

Herodotus, Histories, Book VII, chapter 46; translated by G. C. Macaulay
Xerxes, king of Persia, reviewing his vast army and fleet at the Hellespont, first calls himself happy and then weeps; his uncle Artabanus asks why.

❧

NOVEMBER 20 · READING 325

Wherefore, I say, let a man be of good cheer about his soul, who having cast away the pleasures and ornaments of the body as alien to him and working harm rather than good, has sought after the pleasures of knowledge; and has arrayed the soul, not in some foreign attire, but in her own proper jewels, temperance, and justice, and courage, and nobility, and truth—in these adorned she is ready to go on her journey to the world below, when her hour comes.

Plato, Phaedo, Socrates; translated by Benjamin Jowett
Socrates ends his story of the soul's journey after death with this encouragement to his friends.

❧

NOVEMBER 21 · READING 326

For it is only the love of honour that never grows old; and honour it is, not gain, as some would have it, that rejoices the heart of age and helplessness.

Thucydides, History of the Peloponnesian War, Book II, chapter VI, Pericles; translated by Richard Crawley
At the end of his funeral speech for the Athenian dead, Pericles comforts their aged parents.

❧

NOVEMBER 22 · READING 327

Do you also remind yourself in like manner, that he whom you love is mortal, and that what you love is nothing of your own: it has been given to you for the present, not that it should not be taken from you, nor has it been given to you for all time, but as a fig is given to you or a bunch of grapes at the appointed season of the year.

Epictetus, Discourses, Book III, chapter XXIV; translated by George Long
Epictetus recalls those who stood behind men in their triumphs to remind them that they were mortal, and applies the lesson to love.

❧

NOVEMBER 23 · READING 328

Pass then through this little space of time conformably to nature, and end thy journey in content, just as an olive falls off when it is ripe, blessing nature who produced it, and thanking the tree on which it grew.

Marcus Aurelius, Meditations, Book IV, section 50; translated by George Long
Marcus reminds himself how short life is, and how a life might end well.

❧

NOVEMBER 24 · READING 329

But we ought not to erase from our memory the two years of her life, but to consider them as a time of pleasure giving us gratification and enjoyment, and not to deem the shortness of the blessing as a great evil, nor to be unthankful for what was given us, because Fortune did not give us a longer tenure as we wished.

Plutarch, Morals, Consolatory Letter to His Wife, section VIII; translated by Arthur Richard Shilleto

Plutarch writes to his wife after the death of their little daughter, Timoxena, who lived two years.

❧

NOVEMBER 25 · READING 330

Or, again, as old age is to life, so is evening to day. Evening may therefore be called 'the old age of the day,' and old age, 'the evening of life,' or, in the phrase of Empedocles, 'life's setting sun.'

Aristotle, Poetics, chapter XXI; translated by S. H. Butcher

Aristotle gives examples of metaphor by analogy, where one thing is named by its likeness to another.

❧

NOVEMBER 26 · READING 331

For a noble song passeth down the years with a voice that liveth for aye, / And over the harvest-abounding earth, and across the sea for ever / Goeth the sunbright shining of noble deeds, to be quenchèd never.

Pindar, Isthmian Odes, Isthmian IV, strophe 3; translated by Arthur S. Way

Pindar says that Homer's poetry keeps the fame of the hero Aias alive, as song keeps every noble deed.

❧

NOVEMBER 27 · READING 332

Death is evil; the Gods have so judged: had it been good, they would die.

Sappho, Fragments, fragment 137; translated by Henry Thornton Wharton

Aristotle, in his Rhetoric, quotes this saying of Sappho as an example of an argument.

❧

NOVEMBER 28 · READING 333

Surely we have all forgotten that we are men condemned to die, and how short in the hour, that to us is allotted by Fate.

Bion, Fragments, fragment IX; translated by Andrew Lang

Bion wishes that people had two lives, one for toil and one for joy; since they have only one, he asks why they spend it all on gain.

❧

November 29 · Reading 334

Ah me, when the mallows wither in the garden, and the green parsley, and the curled tendrils of the anise, on a later day they live again, and spring in another year; but we men, we, the great and mighty, or wise, when once we have died, in hollow earth we sleep, gone down into silence; a right long, and endless, and unawakening sleep.

Moschus, Lament for Bion, The Lament for Bion; translated by Andrew Lang

Moschus mourns his teacher, the poet Bion, in a dirge with the refrain, Begin, ye Sicilian Muses, begin the dirge.

❧

November 30 · Reading 335

If only they would start with a clear understanding that they are mortal, that after a brief sojourn on the earth they will wake from the dream of life, and leave all behind them,—they would live more sensibly, and not mind dying so much.

Lucian, Charon, Hermes to Charon; translated by H. W. and F. G. Fowler

Charon, ferryman of the dead, takes a day off to see what life is like, and Hermes shows him mankind from a mountain top.

December

The year closes with home and peace of mind: the hearth, the return of the traveler, the enemy turned to profit, and the contentment that asks for little. December's readings look for the quiet that comes after the work of the year.

DECEMBER 1 · READING 336

For because a man is alone, he is not for that reason also solitary; just as though a man is among numbers, he is not therefore not solitary.

Epictetus, Discourses, Book III, chapter XIII; translated by George Long
In a chapter on solitude, Epictetus distinguishes being alone from being helpless and forsaken.

❧

DECEMBER 2 · READING 337

Of a rich man who was mean and niggardly, he said: "That man does not possess his estate, but his estate possesses him."

Diogenes Laertius, Lives of Eminent Philosophers, Book IV, Bion; translated by C. D. Yonge
Another of Bion's sayings, aimed at a miser who served his money instead of using it.

❧

December 3 · Reading 338

The sage Penelope / In feature and in stature comes not nigh / To thee, for she is mortal—deathless thou, / And ever young; yet day by day I long / To be at home once more, and pine to see / The hour of my return.

Homer, Odyssey, Book V; translated by William Cullen Bryant
Ulysses tells Calypso that his mortal wife Penelope cannot match a goddess, and yet he longs for home.

❧

December 4 · Reading 339

Examine yourself whether you wish to be rich or to be happy.

Epictetus, Fragments, Fragment XIX; translated by George Long
One of the short sayings that Long translated from the collections of Epictetus' fragments.

❧

December 5 · Reading 340

Alexander greeted him, and enquired whether he could do anything for him. "Yes," answered Diogenes, "you can stand a little on one side, and not keep the sun off me."

Plutarch, Lives, Life of Alexander, chapter XIV; translated by Aubrey Stewart
The young king Alexander visits the philosopher Diogenes, who is lying in the sun outside Corinth.

❧

December 6 · Reading 341

"It is not possible to live pleasantly without living prudently and honorably and justly; nor to live prudently and honorably and justly, without living pleasantly.

Diogenes Laertius, Lives of Eminent Philosophers, Book X, Epicurus; translated by C. D. Yonge
Epicurus held pleasure to be the goal of life, but, as this teaching shows, a pleasure that cannot be had without good conduct.

❧

December 7 · Reading 342

For there is naught / More sweet and dear than our own native land / And parents, though perchance our lot be cast / In a rich home, yet far from our own kin / And in a foreign land.

Homer, Odyssey, Book IX; translated by William Cullen Bryant
Ulysses tells his Phaeacian hosts that no goddess who tried to keep him could make him forget his own country.

❧

December 8 · Reading 343

In banquets remember that you entertain two guests, body and soul: and whatever you shall have given to the body you soon eject: but what you shall have given to the soul, you keep always.

Epictetus, Fragments, Fragment XXXI; translated by George Long
Several of the fragments give advice on dinners and guests; this is one of them.

❧

DECEMBER 9 · READING 344

I am very taken with Diogenes' remark to a stranger at Lacedaemon, who was dressing with much display for a feast, "Does not a good man consider every day a feast?" And a very great feast too, if we live soberly.

Plutarch, Morals, On Contentedness of Mind, section XX; translated by Arthur Richard Shilleto

Plutarch wrote this essay as a letter to his friend Paccius, sending him the notes he had made on peace of mind.

❧

DECEMBER 10 · READING 345

One of his sayings was: “Moderation is the best thing.”

Diogenes Laertius, Lives of Eminent Philosophers, Book I, Cleobulus; translated by C. D. Yonge

Cleobulus, a native of Lindus, was one of the men the Greeks counted wise; he is said to have studied philosophy in Egypt.

❧

DECEMBER 11 · READING 346

Endure it, heart! thou didst bear worse than this.

Homer, Odyssey, Book XX; translated by William Cullen Bryant

Home at last but disguised as a beggar, Ulysses watches the insolence in his own house and holds back his anger.

❧

DECEMBER 12 · READING 347

Wealth, I said, and poverty; the one is the parent of luxury and indolence, and the other of meanness and viciousness, and both of discontent.

Plato, The Republic, Book IV, Socrates; translated by Benjamin Jowett
Socrates names the two things that spoil craftsmen and the cities they live in.

❧

DECEMBER 13 · READING 348

To (children) who put their hand into a narrow-necked earthen vessel and bring out figs and nuts, this happens: if they fill the hand, they cannot take it out, and then they cry. Drop a few of them and you will draw things out. And do you part with your desires: do not desire many things and you will have what you want.

Epictetus, Discourses, Book III, chapter IX; translated by George Long
Epictetus speaks to a rhetorician on his way to Rome about a lawsuit, who wants a great deal at once.

❧

DECEMBER 14 · READING 349

But he who thinks those happy who are always scouring the country, and pass most of their lives in inns and ferryboats, is like a person who thinks the planets happier than fixed stars.

Plutarch, Morals, On Exile, section XI; translated by Arthur Richard Shilleto
Plutarch reminds his exiled friend that a quiet, settled life in one place can be a happy one.

❧

December 15 · Reading 350

While Mausolus boasts of the tomb raised to him by Artemisia, his wife and sister, Diogenes knows not whether he has a tomb or no—the question never having occurred to him; he knows only that his name is on the tongues of the wise, as one who lived the life of a man; a higher monument than yours, vile Carian slave, and set on firmer foundations.

Lucian, Dialogues of the Dead, dialogue XXIV, Diogenes to Mausolus; translated by H. W. and F. G. Fowler

Mausolus, king of Caria, boasts in the underworld of his huge tomb at Halicarnassus; the beggar philosopher Diogenes answers him.

❧

December 16 · Reading 351

Having had the question put to him, "What was difficult?" he said: "To be silent about secrets; to make good use of one's leisure, and to be able to submit to injustice."

Diogenes Laertius, Lives of Eminent Philosophers, Book I, Chilo; translated by C. D. Yonge

Chilo the Spartan was so famous for saying much in few words that brevity of speech was called the Chilonean fashion.

❧

December 17 · Reading 352

A rugged region 'tis, but nourishes / Nobly its youths, nor have I ever seen / A sweeter spot on earth.

Homer, Odyssey, Book IX; translated by William Cullen Bryant

Ulysses describes his home, the island of Ithaca, to the king of the Phaeacians.

❧

DECEMBER 18 · READING 353

They know not how much more the half is than the whole, nor what great advantage there is in mallow and asphodel.

Hesiod, Works and Days, lines 25–41; translated by Hugh G. Evelyn-White

Mallow and asphodel were humble wild plants eaten by the poor; Hesiod scolds the greedy lords who judged his quarrel with his brother.

❧

DECEMBER 19 · READING 354

Who will provide today with scanted dole / This wanderer? 'Tis little that he craves, / And less obtains—that less enough for me; / For I am taught by suffering to endure, / And the long years that have grown old with me, / And last not least, by true nobility.

Sophocles, Oedipus at Colonus, Oedipus, opening speech; translated by F. Storr

The play opens with the blind Oedipus, a wandering beggar, led by his daughter Antigone to a grove near Athens.

❧

December 20 · Reading 355

Let each one of us leave every other kind of knowledge and seek and follow one thing only, if peradventure he may be able to learn and may find someone who will make him able to learn and discern between good and evil, and so to choose always and everywhere the better life as he has opportunity.

Plato, The Republic, Book X, Socrates; translated by Benjamin Jowett
Near the end of the Republic, Socrates speaks of the choice of a life as the supreme peril of the human state.

❧

December 21 · Reading 356

You, Antiphon, would seem to suggest that happiness consists of luxury and extravagance; I hold a different creed. To have no wants at all is, to my mind, an attribute of Godhead; to have as few wants as possible the nearest approach to Godhead; and as that which is divine is mightiest, so that is next mightiest which comes closest to the divine.

Xenophon, Memorabilia, Book I, chapter VI, Socrates; translated by H. G. Dakyns
Antiphon, a rival teacher, has mocked Socrates for going without shoes or shirt the whole year round; Socrates replies.

❧

DECEMBER 22 · READING 357

Remember that not only the desire of power and of riches makes us mean and subject to others, but even the desire of tranquillity, and of leisure, and of travelling abroad, and of learning.

Epictetus, Discourses, Book IV, chapter IV; translated by George Long
Epictetus warns that even a wish for leisure or for books can make a person a slave to things outside his power.

❧

DECEMBER 23 · READING 358

The Pythagoreans bid us in the morning look to the heavens that we may be reminded of those bodies which continually do the same things and in the same manner perform their work, and also be reminded of their purity and nudity.

Marcus Aurelius, Meditations, Book XI, section 42; translated by George Long
Marcus recalls a morning practice of the followers of Pythagoras.

❧

DECEMBER 24 · READING 359

If you wish to vex the man who hates you, do not abuse him by calling him a pathick, or effeminate, or intemperate, or a low fellow, or illiberal; but be yourself a man, and temperate, and truthful, and kind and just in all your dealings with those you come across.

Plutarch, Morals, How a Man May Be Benefited by His Enemies, section IV; translated by Arthur Richard Shilleto
Plutarch has just retold Diogenes' answer to a man who asked how to take revenge on an enemy: by becoming good and honest.

❧

DECEMBER 25 · READING 360

Evening, thou that bringest all that bright morning scattered; thou bringest the sheep, the goat, the child back to her mother.

Sappho, Fragments, fragment 95; translated by Henry Thornton Wharton
Sappho's lines to the evening star, which Wharton shows were imitated by Byron and Tennyson.

❧

DECEMBER 26 · READING 361

Here was all their toil, here all their wealth. The threshold had never a door, nor a watch-dog; all things, all, to them seemed superfluity, for Poverty was their sentinel.

Theocritus, Idyls, Idyl XXI; translated by Andrew Lang
Theocritus describes the wattled cabin where the two old fishermen sleep among their nets and creels.

❧

DECEMBER 27 · READING 362

They take the mask for my face, fall in love with its beauty, and are dying to possess it.

Lucian, Timon the Misanthrope, Wealth to Hermes; translated by H. W. and F. G. Fowler
Wealth, sent by Zeus to the ruined Timon, tells Hermes why men love him though he is lame and ugly.

❧

DECEMBER 28 · READING 363

Are we not enslaved, nay, are not our careers completely shipwrecked, by love of gain, that fever which rages unappeased in us all, and love of pleasure?—one the most debasing, the other the most ignoble of the mind's diseases.

Longinus, On the Sublime, chapter XLIV, section 6; translated by H. L. Havell

At the end of the treatise, a philosopher blames the lack of great writers on the loss of liberty; Longinus answers that the worse slavery is to our own desires.

❧

DECEMBER 29 · READING 364

That war is an evil is a proposition so familiar to everyone that it would be tedious to develop it. No one is forced to engage in it by ignorance, or kept out of it by fear, if he fancies there is anything to be gained by it.

Thucydides, History of the Peloponnesian War, Book IV, chapter XIII; translated by Richard Crawley

At a congress of the Sicilian cities at Gela, Hermocrates of Syracuse urges them to make peace among themselves.

❧

DECEMBER 30 · READING 365

Their own country, it appears, is the dearest thing to men.

Euripides, The Phoenician Virgins, Jocasta to Polynices; translated by Theodore Alois Buckley

Jocasta greets her son Polynices, home in Thebes under a truce after years of exile.

❧

DECEMBER 31 · READING 366

Hestia, in the high dwellings of all, both deathless gods and men who walk on earth, you have gained an everlasting abode and highest honour: glorious is your portion and your right. For without you mortals hold no banquet,—where one does not duly pour sweet wine in offering to Hestia both first and last.

Homeric Hymns, To Hestia, lines 1–6; translated by Hugh G. Evelyn-White

The singer honors Hestia, without whom, he says, no feast is held, and asks her to dwell in the house.

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Further Reading

Each of these is the whole work, or the whole collection, from which some of this book's readings are taken, except the last, which is about the commonplace book itself.

William Cullen Bryant, *The Iliad of Homer*, 1870. Bryant's blank-verse translation of the whole poem.

William Cullen Bryant, *The Odyssey of Homer*, 1871. Bryant's blank-verse version of the homecoming of Ulysses.

Benjamin Jowett, *The Dialogues of Plato*, 1871 (third edition 1892). The standard Victorian Plato, with an introduction to each dialogue.

C. D. Yonge, *The Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers*, 1853. Diogenes Laertius in full, sayings and all.

G. C. Macaulay, *The History of Herodotus*, 1890. The whole history in English prose.

Richard Crawley, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, 1874. Thucydides complete, speeches included.

George Long, *The Discourses of Epictetus*, 1877. The teacher's talks, with the Encheiridion and fragments.

Hugh G. Evelyn-White, *Hesiod, the Homeric Hymns and Homerica*, 1914. Hesiod and the Homeric Hymns in plain prose.

Henry Thornton Wharton, *Sappho: Memoir, Text, Selected Renderings, and a Literal Translation*, 1885. The fragments in literal prose, each with a note naming the writer who quoted it.

Andrew Lang, *Theocritus, Bion and Moschus*, 1880. The pastoral poets in English prose.

Arthur S. Way, *Pindar in English Verse*, 1922. Pindar's victory odes in long-lined English verse.

Aubrey Stewart, *Plutarch's Lives*, 1880–1882. The George Bell edition of the Lives quoted here.

John Locke, *A New Method of Making Common-Place-Books*, 1706. A short guide to keeping a commonplace book, by the philosopher.

Sources of the Texts

Every reading is copied from the electronic text named, character for character, by the script that made this book; nothing was retyped. Texts from Standard Ebooks are that project's corrected editions of the printed translation; Project Gutenberg texts were taken from the GITenberg copies of them. Reading numbers follow each source. Translators' footnotes and the markers that point to them are left out everywhere, and verse line breaks are shown with a slash. In all, 366 readings.

- **William Cullen Bryant (1794–1878):** Homer, *The Iliad*, blank verse, first published by Fields, Osgood in 1870; Standard Ebooks edition; readings 4, 21, 61, 63, 65, 69, 71, 80, 118, 127, 192, 214, 221, 231, 263, 278, 282, 306, 308, 310 (*Iliad*). Bryant's book headings and notes are left out.
- **William Cullen Bryant (1794–1878):** Homer, *The Odyssey*, blank verse, first published by J. R. Osgood in 1871; Standard Ebooks edition; readings 8, 12, 33, 35, 42, 51, 67, 93, 97, 102, 108, 136, 148, 160, 170, 202, 292, 312, 320, 338, 342, 346, 352 (*Odyssey*). Bryant's book headings and notes are left out.
- **C. D. Yonge (1812–1891):** Diogenes Laertius, *The Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers*, translated 1853; Standard Ebooks edition; readings 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13, 15, 20, 32, 34, 41, 50, 70, 79, 117, 169, 191, 201, 220, 230, 245, 247, 249, 251, 253, 262, 277, 281, 291, 311, 319, 337, 341, 345, 351 (*Lives of Eminent Philosophers*). Notes are left out.

- **Benjamin Jowett (1817–1893):** Plato, *The Dialogues of Plato*, Clarendon Press, 1871, third edition 1892; Standard Ebooks edition of the *Dialogues*; readings 2, 6, 307 (*Apology*); 10, 111, 153, 159, 176, 207, 218, 225, 248, 250, 256, 347, 355 (*The Republic*); 16 (*Protagoras*); 23, 123, 130, 139, 284 (*Phaedrus*); 38, 46 (*Symposium*); 55 (*Lysis*); 74, 237 (*Laws*); 84 (*Laches*); 166 (*Gorgias*); 196 (*Timaeus*); 246 (*Theaetetus*); 267 (*Meno*); 296 (*Euthyphro*); 314, 325 (*Phaedo*). Jowett's introductions and analyses are left out.
- **Aubrey Stewart (1844–1918):** Plutarch, *Plutarch's Lives*, George Bell and Sons, volume I 1894, volume II 1899, volume III 1892; Project Gutenberg texts 14033, 14114 and 14140; readings 76, 131, 167, 179, 189, 210, 252, 259, 275, 279, 340 (*Lives*). None of the lives quoted is among the thirteen translated by George Long that the same edition includes. Notes are left out.
- **Arthur Richard Shilleto (1848–1894):** Plutarch, *Plutarch's Morals*, translation first published 1888; text from the George Bell and Sons edition of 1898, Project Gutenberg text 23639; readings 19, 30, 60, 87, 109, 120, 142, 198, 219, 228, 241, 271, 287, 300, 329, 344, 349, 359 (*Morals*). Footnotes and their bracketed numbers are left out.
- **George Long (1800–1879):** Epictetus, *The Discourses of Epictetus*, with the Encheiridion and fragments, George Bell, 1877; Standard Ebooks editions of the *Discourses* and the *Short Works*; readings 18, 299, 339, 343 (*Fragments*); 25, 75, 86, 105, 113, 141, 178, 209, 227, 239, 258, 270, 286, 315, 327, 336, 348, 357 (*Discourses*). Long's introduction and notes are left out.
- **George Long (1800–1879):** Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, in Long's translation as printed by Ticknor and Fields in 1864 and Bell and Daldy in 1869; text and section numbers as in this series' complete edition of the *Meditations*, whose numbers can differ from other editions; readings 26, 240, 328, 358 (*Meditations*). Long's notes are left out.

- **Richard Crawley (1840–1893):** Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, complete 1874; Standard Ebooks edition; readings 68, 78, 90, 177, 184, 188, 197, 208, 226, 238, 268, 285, 297, 326, 364 (*History of the Peloponnesian War*). Chapters are cited by Crawley's continuous numbering; notes are left out.
- **G. C. Macaulay (1852–1915):** Herodotus, *The History of Herodotus*, Macmillan, 1890; Standard Ebooks edition, titled *Histories*; readings 14, 22, 64, 73, 83, 158, 165, 175, 183, 185, 187, 195, 206, 217, 224, 236, 324 (*Histories*). Macaulay's notes are left out.
- **H. G. Dakyns (1838–1911):** Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, from *The Works of Xenophon*, first published 1897 by Macmillan and Co.; Project Gutenberg text 1177; readings 17, 24, 39, 47, 56, 85, 95, 99, 104, 112, 140, 257, 269, 298, 356 (*Memorabilia*). Dakyns' notes and their numbers in parentheses are left out.
- **Theodore Alois Buckley (1825–1856):** Euripides, *The Tragedies of Euripides*, volume I, literally translated or revised, Harper and Brothers, New York, 1892; Project Gutenberg text 15081; readings 29, 54, 323 (*Alcestis*); 37, 194 (*Orestes*); 45 (*Medea*); 91, 174 (*The Heraclidae*); 149, 266, 295 (*The Bacchae*); 157, 164, 205, 255, 365 (*The Phoenician Virgins*); 186 (*Hecuba*); 235 (*Hippolytus*). Footnotes and their bracketed numbers are left out.
- **E. D. A. Morshead (1849–1912):** Aeschylus, *The House of Atreus*, reviewed in 1881 and reprinted by Macmillan (a 1920 printing is recorded); Project Gutenberg text 8604, which names no printing; readings 150, 155, 162, 172, 215, 264, 294, 321 (*Agamemnon*); 193 (*The Furies*). The Libation-bearers is not quoted.
- **E. H. Plumptre (1821–1891):** Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*, from *The Tragedies of Aeschylos*, Routledge, 1867, and Strahan, 1868; text and line numbers as prepared for this series' complete edition of the play; readings 81, 203, 222, 233 (*Prometheus Bound*). Plumptre's notes are left out.

- **F. Storr (1839–1919):** Sophocles, *Sophocles*, with an English translation, Loeb Classical Library, William Heinemann, two volumes, 1912 and 1913; Standard Ebooks editions of the six plays; readings 44, 156, 204, 254 (*Antigone*); 53, 72, 163 (*Ajax*); 62, 151, 223, 313, 354 (*Oedipus at Colonus*); 82, 234 (*Philoctetes*); 173, 216, 265 (*Oedipus the King*); 322 (*Electra*). Speakers' names, introductions and notes are left out.
- **Hugh G. Evelyn-White (1884–1924):** Hesiod and the Homeric Hymns, *Hesiod, the Homeric Hymns and Homerica*, Loeb Classical Library, William Heinemann, 1914; Project Gutenberg text 348; readings 31, 36, 43, 52, 92, 94, 96, 98, 100, 103, 110, 129, 138, 154, 161, 171, 232, 353 (*Works and Days*); 283, 293 (*Theogony*); 121, 128 (*To Earth the Mother of All*); 137 (*To Demeter*); 152 (*To Pan*); 366 (*To Hestia*). The line-range labels at the head of each paragraph and the bracketed note numbers are left out.
- **Henry Thornton Wharton (1846–1895):** Sappho, *Sappho: Memoir, Text, Selected Renderings, and a Literal Translation*, first published 1885; text from the John Lane edition of 1908, Project Gutenberg text 57390; readings 40, 48, 57, 114, 125, 133, 144, 180, 303, 309, 317, 332, 360 (*Fragments*). Only Wharton's own literal prose is quoted; the Greek, the verse renderings by other hands and his notes are left out.
- **Arthur S. Way (1847–1930):** Pindar, *Pindar in English Verse*, Macmillan, 1922; Standard Ebooks edition, titled *Victory Odes*; readings 119, 242, 302, 331 (*Isthmian Odes*); 122, 229 (*Olympian Odes*); 124, 143, 289 (*Nemean Odes*); 132, 276, 280, 316 (*Pythian Odes*). Way's introduction and notes are left out.
- **Andrew Lang (1844–1912):** Theocritus, Bion and Moschus, *Theocritus, Bion and Moschus, Rendered into English Prose*, Macmillan, 1880; text from the Macmillan edition of 1889, Project Gutenberg text 4775; Theocritus, readings 49, 58, 101, 106, 115, 126, 134, 145,

243, 361 (*Idyls*); Bion, readings 59, 116, 333 (*Fragments*), 107 (*The Seasons*), 146 (*Lament for Adonis*); Moschus, readings 211 (*Idyl V*), 334 (*Lament for Bion*). The page numbers in braces, Lang's essay and notes, and the speakers' names are left out.

- **S. H. Butcher (1850–1910):** Aristotle, *Poetics*, first published by Macmillan in 1895 in *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*; Project Gutenberg text 1974, which names no edition; readings 27, 260, 272, 288, 301, 330 (*Poetics*). The transcriber's annotations are left out.
- **William Ellis (1730–1801):** Aristotle, *Politics*, as *A Treatise on Government*, first published 1776; text from J. M. Dent's Everyman edition, first issued 1912, Project Gutenberg text 6762; readings 182, 200, 213 (*Politics*). The editor's introduction is left out.
- **H. L. Havell (died 1913):** Longinus, *On the Sublime*, Macmillan, 1890; Project Gutenberg text 17957; readings 135, 147, 261, 274, 290, 305, 363 (*On the Sublime*). Andrew Lang's introduction and the bracketed note numbers are left out.
- **H. W. Fowler (1858–1933) and F. G. Fowler (1870–1918):** Lucian, *The Works of Lucian of Samosata*, volume I, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1905; Project Gutenberg text 6327; readings 28 (*The Vision*); 88, 318, 350 (*Dialogues of the Dead*); 244, 335 (*Charon*); 273 (*Nigrinus*); 362 (*Timon the Misanthrope*). Notes are left out.
- **Charles Rann Kennedy (1808–1867):** Demosthenes, *The Olynthiacs and the Philippics*, literally translated, with notes; Kennedy's orations were first published by H. G. Bohn in 1852, and this title was reprinted in 1891 and 1899; Project Gutenberg text 6878, which names no printing; readings 66, 77, 89 (*First Philippic*); 168, 181, 304 (*Second Olynthiac*); 190 (*Second Philippic*); 199, 212 (*Third Philippic*). Kennedy's arguments and notes are left out.

Edition Notes

The readings: The readings are reproduced word for word from public domain translations. Each translator, edition and date is listed under Sources of the Texts, with what this edition leaves out.

The apparatus: The introduction, headnotes, questions, reflections, practices, notes, glossary, chronology and reading list were drafted with the help of artificial intelligence and checked by hand against the readings and against published sources. Every quotation in them matches the readings printed in this book word for word, and every fact was checked against a published source before it was printed. The publisher keeps a record of the source checked for each fact. No quotation, fact or story was invented. The readings themselves are copied unchanged from the translations named under Sources of the Texts.

Locators: a note marked 3.4 refers to Reading 3, paragraph or line 4, as numbered in the margin.

Corrections: readers who find an error are invited to report it to the publisher. Corrections will appear in later editions.