

Chapter 25

What is a Good Book?

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Understanding the Text

1. What, according to Ruskin, are the limitations of the good book of the hour?

Answer

According to Ruskin, the limitations of the good book of the hour are that these are not true books but merely letters or newspapers in good print. The good books of the hour are simply some useful or pleasant talk of some person whom one cannot otherwise converse with. These good books are written merely for the purpose of communication to a wider audience. According to the essayist, these good books are rather books of talk which are printed only because their authors cannot speak to thousands of people at once. These are mere conveyance of voice through printed words.

2. What are the criteria that Ruskin feels that readers should fulfil to make themselves fit for the company of the Dead?

Answer

The criteria that Ruskin feels that readers should fulfil to make themselves fit for the company of the Dead are that one must be laborious and meritorious. Ruskin feels that no wealth will bribe, no name will overawe, no artifice will deceive the Dead. Ruskin says that in order to be with their company one has to rise to the level of their thoughts.

3. Why does Ruskin feel that reading the work of a good author is a painstaking task?

Answer

Ruskin feels that reading the work of a good author is a painstaking task as it is not very easy to get into the meaning of the words that the author has written. He says that one has to be prepared to work like an

Australian Miner to understand a good book which is born of wisdom. Just as mining is a very painstaking task, so is reading a good book, according to the author. In other words, the essayist means that one has to go through between the lines to understand the pithy words in the good books. Like an Australian miner, one needs patience and hard work to understand the works of the good authors.

4. What is the emphasis placed by Ruskin on accuracy?

Answer

Ruskin emphasised on accuracy by pointing out that the entire difference between education and non education consists in accuracy. Ruskin says a well educated gentleman may not know many languages – may not be able to speak any but his own – may have read very few books. But whatever language he knows, he knows precisely, whatever word he pronounces, he pronounces rightly etc, Ruskin points out that one may chose to read all the books in the British museum and may remain an utterly illiterate, uneducated person but that if one read ten pages of a good book, letter by letter, i.e., with real accuracy that truly is rewarding.

Talking about the Text

1. Ruskin's insistence on looking intensely at words, and assuring oneself of meaning, syllable by syllable – nay, letter by letter.

Answer

Ruskin advises that one should look intensely at words and assure oneself of meaning, syllable by syllable – nay, letter by letter. He means to say that one should go between the lines to get into the core of the text of any good book. This may be time taking and painstaking but very rewarding. This gives accuracy which is the mark of an educated person. A well educated person may read few books but if he or she reads them word by word, syllable by syllable only then can he/she reap the fruit, gather wisdom and transform life.

Another View

Reading between the lines is time taking. So, there is every possibility that in this process one may not develop a wider perspective on various issues of life. This would be so because one will be able to read few books only. One may develop narrow aristocratic attitude by reading few

books. To develop a comprehensive view point one should be aware of the perspectives of as many authors as possible. Extensive reading is very valuable. The essayist talks only of intensive reading. Moreover, it is very difficult to categorise book as good or bad. This type of categorisation totally depends on subjective assessment. This is relative in nature; what is good book for some may not be so for the other.

2. Choice of diction is very crucial to the communication of meaning.

Answer

Communication through words may be easy but for effective communication emphasis has to be given on the choice of diction. In fact, the impact of any communication depends on the choice of diction. A set of words may convey almost the same meaning but out of these words only a particular word will convey the meaning effectively.