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TO BE EVERYWHERE IS TO BE NOWHERE

In my younger days, my voracious appetite for reading drove me to purchase books that I intended to read but somehow never did, books that would end up sitting on my bookshelf for years, collecting dust and taking up space, for it always seemed easier finding the money to buy the books than finding the time to read them. All too often I walked out of a bookstore weighing 10 pounds more than when I strolled in. It wasn't that I didn't like to read. In fact, that was the problem. I had far too many books and only a limited amount of time.

Does any of that sound familiar?

Then one day, while reading a book by Annie Besant, I came across some very useful advice:

In one way, the multitude of books that we have at the present day is a disadvantage. It induces reading without thinking, which produces superficiality and fickleness of thought. That is why I always advise people to read a little and then reproduce what they have read, not by memory, but out of the clear grasp of the subject that they have obtained. Only what you have thought out is really yours, and only by thinking over and understanding what you read and hear, can you make it your own." (*Talks on the Path of Occultism*, Volume I)

I've tried taking that advice to heart, reading fewer books but spending more time on books of substance, pausing frequently to reflect, consider, and question, and then attempting to recapitulate the author's main ideas using my own words.

Seneca, a first-century Roman statesman and philosopher seems to be on the same page as Annie Besant. He is remembered for his *Letters From a Stoic*, a book that enjoyed a resurgence in popularity during the European Renaissance. In Letter 2, he offers some advice to a friend who was given to spending much time with books:

Be careful ... that there is no element of discursiveness and desultoriness about this reading you refer to, this reading of many different authors and books of every description. You should be extending your stay among writers whose genius is unquestionable. To be everywhere is to be nowhere. A multitude of books only gets in one's way.

I think Seneca had it right But then he never walked into a mega bookstore.

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