

WHEN AND WHAT TO READ—Continued

When Lamps are Lit

"It is at night, and after dinner," said Stevenson in his delicious essay on "Walking Tours," "that the best hour comes. If you read a book, you find the language strangely racy, and harmonious; words take a new meaning; single sentences possess the ear for half-an-hour together; and the writer endears himself to you, at every page, by the nicest coincidences of sentiment. It seems as if it were a book you had written yourself in a dream." And then he recalls Hazlitt's well-known experience, and how, "with amorous precision," he told how on the 10th of April, 1798, he sat down to a volume of the "New Heloise," at the inn at Llangollen "over a bottle of sherry and a cold chicken." He was in the proper mood, and the book became an ideal book—how much so, those who know the history of the author of the "Liber Amoris" understand only too well.

Dr. Johnson in his wise old way summed it all up:—"For general improvement a man should read whatever his immediate inclination prompts him to; though, to be sure, if a man has a science to learn, he must regularly and resolutely advance. What we read with inclination makes a much stronger impression." And, good reader as he was, he gave this sage advice gathered doubtless from experience:—"If a man begins to read in the middle of a book, and feels an inclination to go on, let him not quit it, to go to the beginning. He may, perhaps, not feel again the inclination."

What, then, is the conclusion of the whole matter? Perchance it will be deemed lame and impotent. We do not control our moods for reading. They seize us, hold us captive, pleasantly possess us, and they do it by a hundred different arts and devices. They lure us by sweet temptations, they bind us by dim enchantments, they hold us by compelling force. Let the love of books exist, and the moods will come. That is all. And now for a book and a shady nook. That happens to be my own mood to-day.

TWO NEW STORIES

"I HEARD a queer story about that mountain over yonder from our coachman to-day."

"What was that?"

"A young lady and gentleman went out for a walk on that hill; they went up higher and higher, and never came back again."

"Dear me! What became of the unhappy pair?"

"They went down on the other side."

DRIVER (to quiet stranger in suburban road): "Hi, mister, just hold that there horse's head for a minute while I get down, will yer?"

Stranger (nervously): "Wh-wh-which one?"

Driver: "Why, the off 'un, to be sure."

Stranger: "My good man, I am totally unacquainted with horses, and it is quite impossible for me to tell which of your animals is an orphan."

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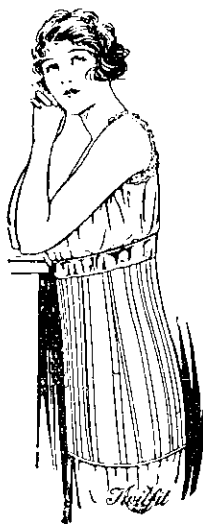
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