other means, and the person who says that she cannot write an interesting letter confesses that she is too lazy or too indifferent to her friend to give the letter just such attention.

The girl who is really anxious to cultivate this happy art should read the letters of Celia Thaxter, Scott, Cooper, Lamb; observe their style and substance and for a time imitate their forms and expression. She might, also, register a private vow that each letter she sends shall be so kind and cordial and winning, so free from anything like gossip or slander, that not only will the recipient set it apart from the common pile bound to the waste-basket, but its possible reappearance years later shall bring neither shame to the sender nor anything but renewed pleasure to the reader.

ON READING

X

YOU ask for suggestions upon reading, and your request reminds me of the young lady who, having a half-hour of leisure, begged Voltaire to tell her the history of the world!

You inquire if I have read a half-dozen new novels, and in the same breath you complain that you cannot cope with the piles of current literature, much less make up the old. Truly, books are in the saddle and ride the world, and you want to know what to do about it.

First, then, let me beg you to adopt some principle of selection.

> Amassing flowers,
> Youth sighed, "Which rose make ours?
> Which lily leave?"

But be sure that, whatever you

choose, some one will consider that particular choice a foolish waste of time. If it lie in the line of your life-work, so much the better; but anything which attracts your attention will serve, be it, as Sir Herbert Maxwell says, "the precession of the equinoxes or postage-stamps, the Athenian drama or London street-cries: follow it from book to book, and unconsciously your knowledge, not of that subject only, but of many subjects, will be increased, for the departments of knowledge are divided by no octrol."

Having chosen a subject, much of the art of reading lies in judicious skipping. "You may know the flavour of a cheese," declares Oliver Wendell Holmes, "without eating it entire." The art is to pass over all that does not concern us while missing nothing that does. In every volume, in every magazine, in every newspaper even, there is a little bit

that we ought to read, and much, very much, that is better disregarded. In this we must be as independent of custom as in the selection of our subject.

We lose vigour through thinking continually the same set of thoughts, and the person who has leisure to read uninterruptedly may well have several books on hand at the same time with which to vary though not encroach upon his chosen field. In this way a historical student may obtain a fair idea of science and belles-lettres. Imaginative literature should have a place in every course of reading. Fox said that "men first found out that they had minds by making and tasting poetry;" Lowell, that "poetry frequents and keeps habitable the upper chambers of the mind, which open towards the sun's rising;" and Frederic Harrison puts the "emotional side of literature as the one most needed for daily life."

Certain outlines of history and biography should become familiar; and in these days of theological and sociological novels, that department is almost barred the term "light reading." May I here offer a protest against many of the so-called "strong" novels of the day—sordid, pessimistic, without a ray of light to "gild the unguarded moments we steal from time"? For my part, I prefer to learn, if learn from novels I must, from contemplation of what is brave and fair and of good report, rather than from hatred of what is mean and low and foul. "An underbred book," says Charles Dudley Warner, "is worse than any possible epidemic."

As to magazines, too many of our best works there see their first light for us to disregard them; and newspapers must have our regular but summary attention. Mr. Hammerton declares that the reason the

French peasants are so bewildered and out of place in the modern world is because they never read a newspaper. By means of head-lines and editorials, however, we may quickly wrest the essentials and discard the remainder.

After the what comes the how. To get from a book the best it can give, you must be properly presented to it. The name of the author is as important as the name of your hostess at a reception. One of Souvestre's most charming works, "Les Derniers Bretons," owed its failure in England to being translated from a German version—the absurd result of the bad practice of not reading prefaces. Francis Lieber's advice to his son was that "whenever you get a new book you must decide whether you will read or study it through at once, or put it away as a book of reference, to read parts upon occasions. If the latter is the

case, you must read the table of contents. If that is wanting, you must glance over the book, so that you know what subjects are treated. If you put it on the shelf without this, you might as well not possess it at all. Mark this for all your life: the question is always important, when we own a thing, 'Are we master of it?' Books, money, fields, power, knowledge, are not our own, although we may own them, if we are not master of them."

There are two ways of impressing what we read upon the memory. One is by repetition, as Watteau painted St. Nicholases in a shop until he could produce them with his eyes closed; and the other by concentration of thought upon a single reading. The first is the parrot and the schoolboy method; the second, that of the time-saver and the thinker. This power of concentration is one of the most difficult things in the

world, and is attained only by earnest effort. The practice of making brief notes from memory after one has read a chapter or volume is admirable discipline; and some system of marking and note-making is indispensable. Do not be tempted to leave a passage before its meaning is clear to you, content if the author "babbles pleasantly enough to keep your thoughts in a state of agreeable titillation;" and pay close attention to words. We have all laughed over the school-teacher in "Marcella" who, when unable to pronounce a word herself, dismissed it with "Say Jerusalem, my dear, and pass on!"

Ruskin complains that we are prone to say, "How good that passage is—that is exactly what I think!" whereas the right feeling should be, "How strange that is! I never thought of that before, and yet I see that it is true; or, if I do not now, I hope I shall some day." The reader

who looks for advancement must read with an open mind. Whether you agree with a book or not is of little consequence. The point is, does it make you think? Does it illumine the dark places in your mind, and stir your feelings to the point of right action? "What Guizot learned this morning," a contemporary said of him, "he has the air of having known from all eternity." Above all, readers must not imagine that all the pleasure of composition depends on the author. The reader must himself bring something to the book. Everything depends on the spirit with which we approach it. The key to all secrets we must carry in ourselves.

There is no good thing, however, without its dangers, and the love of reading accedes to the general law. It is apt to be indulged in to downright gluttony, and to occupy time which should be given to other duties. "How dare I read Wash-

ington's campaigns," wrote Emerson, "when I have not answered my letters? Much of our reading is a pusillanimous desertion of our work to gaze after our neighbours."

It is not so much the badness of a novel that we should dread as its overwrought interest. "The best romance," says Ruskin, "becomes dangerous if by its excitement it renders the ordinary course of life uninteresting, and increases the morbid thirst for acquaintance with scenes in which we shall never be called to act." Have we the courage of the German boy reading a blood-and-thunder novel? In the midst of it he said to himself: "This will never do. I get too much excited over it. I cannot study so well after it. So here it goes." And he flung the book into the river. He was Fichte, the great German philosopher.

Finally, why should we read? To be "deep-versed in books, and shal-

low in ourselves"? to "know for knowing's sake, the wonder it inspires"? so that we may lose ourselves in the contemplation of a description and never raise our eyes to the towering mountain and the flying cloud? Does self-burial in one's library come from the love of literature?

Indeed, no. While to use books rightly is to go to them for help; to appeal to them when our knowledge and our power of thought fail; to be led by them into purer conceptions than our own, and receive from them "the united councils of all time against our solitary and unstable opinion," it is yet more than this. Whenever we find another human voice to answer ours, and another human hand to take in our own, we should open that book. "All the books," affirms Walter Besant, "that were ever written are valuable only as they help us to read and under-

stand the language in which they are written."

So, my dear young lady, I have drawn this bare outline around the subject you indicated. It is as different from the realization as "ten minutes by the clock differs from ten minutes of happiness," as it is different from the two points in the adventure of the diver:

> One when, a beggar, he prepares to plunge;
> One when, a prince, he rises with his pearl.

RECIPES FOR THINKING

XI

"IF you have such a thing," a sprightly young girl wrote to an older friend, "will you send me a recipe to make me think? You may laugh, but I really do not form opinions and follow up things in my own mind as I know I ought to do. I have not formed the habit—if so important a thing can be called a habit."

Thinking is a good deal like complexion. If from very childhood a person has lived on plain, nourishing food, eschewing sweetmeats and pastry and pickles; if she has worked and played under God's bright sky, stretching, expanding and suppling the muscles; if she has been careful and regular in her habits—her complexion calls for no cosmetics.

If, on the contrary, a person has had improper or scanty food, if she

has yielded to adverse circumstances and lazily refrained from exercise, if she has let herself slip into uncleanly or irregular habits and violated the laws of nature, her complexion needs a thorough course of treatment. It means not reading recipes nor sleeping in some preparation, it means hard work, my dear, self-denial, self-control. There is no doubt, however, but it can be done, and the result is more than worth the effort.

"We take readily to proprietary medicines," says Charles Dudley Warner. "It is easier to dose with these than to exercise ordinary prudence about our health. And we readily believe the doctors of learning when they assure us that we can acquire a new language by the same method by which we can restore bodily vigour: take one small patent-right volume in six easy lessons, without even the necessity of shaking, and without a regular doctor, and we

shall know the language. Some one else has done the work for us, and we need only absorb."

No Meisterschaft system, however, will save you, my dear girl. You need the old-fashioned grammar first. Before you can think you must have something to think about. You must get something into your head before you can get anything out. The brain is the most delicate of instruments, and nothing but ceaseless, patient effort will enable you to use it with perfect skill.

The remedies which the best physicians would recommend for your case are right reading, right conversation and right observation.

Did you ever notice how people seem to dread being left alone with their own minds, and how they read to escape thinking? Watch the occupants of a railway station. Some suck their minds into a vacuum with novels; the less fortunate employ for

the same purpose a stale newspaper or the time-cards upon the wall. "Have you a mind, visit it often," says an Eastern proverb, "for thorns and brushwood obstruct the road which no one treads." "There are few brains," Lowell suggests, "which would not be better for living, for a little while, on their own fat."

The best reading, however, is the proper food of the mind. No one can read Emerson or Goethe or Browning without being unconsciously educated, without being taught to think. The very effort to comprehend their meaning is thought. Such writers are a recipe in themselves.

In any reading attention must be your watchword. Challenge every point that the writer makes. Do you agree with him? If so, why? If not, why? How would Shakespeare have regarded it? Has any other great author expressed the

same thing? If so, refer to it. Which is more forcible and why? Notice the figures of speech. Are they additions or detractions? If they refer to science or nature, verify them; to classical literature, make them your own. Scrutinize words. Why is this chosen rather than another? What other words come from the same root, and what is their relationship? A page mastered in this way outweighs a volume superficially skimmed.

Next in importance to books for the would-be thinker is conversation. Talking shapes our thought for us and gives to airy nothings a local habitation and a name. But in the same degree that we must shun commonplace and mediocre writers, must we strive after the best in conversation. Intercourse with strong minds will strengthen ours. The ambitious tennis player seeks a superior antagonist. He bears defeat

smilingly, knowing that every contest has taught him a new trick of serving, a better plan of placing balls. Against the strong sense of a wise converser our dull ideas are sharpened and polished into effective weapons. But we must bring them forward and submit them to the process, even though our choicest nicks be ground away, and the comfortable rust of years which has covered us like a garment be dissolved.

Few of us appreciate the effect of nature upon our character. We are educated by what calls forth in us attention, love, admiration. It is the "stoop of the soul," says Browning, "which in bending up-raises it too." What would Ruskin have been without the inspiration of the mountains? Thoreau without his Walden? Wordsworth without his lakes and valleys? The last-named poet struck a key-note when he wrote of his Lucy:

"Beauty born of murmuring sound
Shall pass into her face."

We learn to think as we take diseases, by contagion. The sweeping stars teach us lessons of infinite order and steadfast purpose. The rolling oceans and the great winds speak to us their prophecies and aspirations. The mountains create in us the exalted mood; the grass and flowers and birds offer their rich gifts to every passer-by. Day by day Mother Nature opens her great text-book and stands ready to instruct us. "We are all richer than we think," mourns Montaigne, "but we are brought up to go a-begging." The power of thought is not external; it is implanted in our minds, and

"*To know*
Rather consists in opening out a way
Whence the imprisoned splendour may escape
Than in effecting entry for a light
Supposed to be without."

THE STARRY SKIES

XII

IF, day after day, the same persons should gather about your dinner-table, persons of transcendent beauty of face and form, possessing qualities of mind and heart with which even a cursory acquaintance would reveal to you undreamed-of wonders, and an intimate friendship with which would bring you lasting delight and lift you above the petty irritabilities of your nature; if, wherever you went, such companions should attend you, never interfering, never intruding, never growing old—would it not pass belief that you should be ignorant of their names and residences, that you should lower your veil as they passed, that meeting them in foreign lands you should be unable to distinguish them one from another?