

BOOKS AND THINGS.



R. Johnson must have been in one of his unusually snorty moods, when he said: "It makes no more difference what book a man reads first, than what leg he puts into his breeches first. Read anything five hours a day, and you will become learned." Poor "Bozzy" alone could tell us the full meaning of this dogma, *i.e.*, he alone could say with what peculiar scale of grunts and puffs, etc., it was delivered, and Bozzy, like the hero he worshipped, has long since ceased to take cognizance of "books and things," but we lingerers on the scene of action, are reasonably excusable if we do stop and ask ourselves, in these days of overwhelming appliances, bewildering resources, of ceaseless publications—how many of these millions of books can I familiarize myself with? We can't read them all, that's sure, though we have all sorts of inventions for condensing labor. And if you please, Dr. Johnson, considering we are not in dangerous proximity to each other, I beg to state that now-a-days it does matter what books I read first. I'm not speaking of books of scientific study, nor of books of moral and æsthetic instruction, but of the books that come under the head of *Literature* as the word is generally understood to-day.

Everybody reads them, which is the same as saying everybody reads novels, for reasons too plausible to require statement here. Have we not the philosophical novel? the theological? the political? the scientific? Indeed haven't we begun to surmise that it is about time we had no more of these! Then there's the rubbish to be grandly ignored; of course, the novel I mean, with a "highly stimulating cover!"

Our *Embarras du Choix* does not concern these, but it really does bother us when we scan the rear pages, *i.e.*, the editorial pages of our best toned magazines and reviews, to say nothing of the "Book Buyer," and similar attractive

catalogues, as to what we shall take out of all these fascinating productions? It may not be exactly a matter of much moment with us as to which ones we shall take first, but which ones shall we take at all? So little leisure have the most fortunate of us, and so really worthy of our attention are so many of the bright new things—some of the wiseacres may cut the knot by ignoring these too. That is too much wisdom, (I mean too much lack of wisdom,) for the mind must unbend, and he is a wise physician who prescribes books instead of pills and powders and tonics. What more delightful and efficacious tonic than some of the books that some doctors have mentioned to their patients, whose malady was the now almost universal one of brain worry and nerve exhaustion?

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I don't know how it may strike the patient (?) reader of these jottings, but it strikes me, that we have every reason to congratulate ourselves on what I may safely call "signs of the times,"—good signs of good times. What's the use of growing green by dint of morbid denunciation of our times? Does not the good prevail even in this much abused age? I'm not verging on anything like the years carved on Methuselah's tombstone, still less am I waxing anywhere near an approach to Solomon's sapience. Yet, since I'm living in an age where free speech is allowed everyone, I do assert there is much to cheer one on to the culture of optimism. Have we not all been relieved by what we have heard of "dress reform" even though we can't say much of what we have *seen* yet ("faith cometh by hearing,") we are full of hope for the near future, and is it not a healthy indication that molasses has superseded syrup on our breakfast menu? that bread and butter are more fashionable than cake and cream with our tea? But let me confine myself to books, leaving "things" for another moment of inspiration (?) Who is then so wickedly *contraire* as to refuse an enthusiastic recognition of such pleasant recreative books as F. Anstey's "Vice Versa," his "Fallen Idol,"—or some of