

PACE IN READING.

A common and trivial excuse given by those who read little is that they have no time for reading. . . . Many persons in mature life are conscious of a gentle and luxurious sentiment in favor of reading, which comes to nothing because they do not know how to read. With all the good will in the world, they lack concentration and the habit of dispatch. . . . The best reading is both intensive and extensive; one reads a little of everything, and a great deal of some things. The good reader takes all reading to be his province. Newspapers, periodicals, books old and new, all present themselves to him in their proper perspective; they are all grist to his mill, but they do not go into the same hopper or require the same process. On the contrary, one of the main distinctions of the clever reader is that, without varying as to intensity, he varies almost indefinitely as to pace. This power of reading flexibly comes mainly, of course, with practice. For those who have lacked an early experience of books, the manipulation of them is never likely to become the perfect and instinctive process of adjustment which it should be.

This anxious but unskilled reader is too likely to have a set gait, so many words to the minute or lines to the hour. An essay, an editorial, a chapter in a novel or in the Bible, a scientific article, a short story, if they contain the same number of words, take up just the same amount of this misguided person's time. No wonder reading becomes an incubus to him, with the appalling monotony of its procession of printed words filing endlessly before him. He really has time enough if he knew how to make use of it. Eben Holden keeps him busy for a week or more; it should be read in a few hours. . . . The trained reader readjusts his focus for each objective. Milton may be read in words or lines. Macaulay in sentences, Thackeray in paragraphs, Conan Doyle in pages. The eye, that is, readily gains the power of taking in words in groups instead of separately. How large a group the glance can manage varies with the seriousness of the subject.