

READING IN BED.

Probably most men, says the "British Medical Journal," except such as go in terror of their wives, read in bed, but the custom is generally felt, even by those who are its slaves, to require some excuse. Such excuse may be furnished them by Dr. Osler. The Regius Professor of Medicine at Oxford would doubtless deny that there is any need for excuse. In regard to reading in bed he would say, with Luther, *pecca fortiter*. In good set terms he advises everyone to read for half an hour before going to sleep, and he has taken the trouble to draw up a list of what may be called bedside books. This includes such light literature as Marcus Aurelius, Epictetus, and Plutarch's "Lives," with other books of the kind that no gentleman's library should be without, and that, unfortunately, few gentlemen read in bed or out of bed. This opens up the question, What books are most suitable for reading in bed, it being assumed that the reader is not a superior person, but the *homme sensuel moyen*? Obviously, the answer depends on the object with which he reads. He may do so for mere amusement or because he wishes, like Bottom, to have an "exposition of sleep" come upon him. In the former case anything that interests without exciting will serve. As a rule, Wilkie Collins and other masters of plot-weaving should be avoided, as likely to murder sleep; Richardson, of whom Johnson said that anyone who should read him for the story would hang himself, is the great exemplar of bedside authors. Among contemporary writers we know of none better as a bed-side companion than Mr. W. W. Jacobs; one drifts along on the lazy stream of his story, lulled deliciously to forgetfulness by the gentle ripple of his humour. Having reached the period of old fogeydom, Scott, Dickens, and Thackeray are our favourites. When reading is deliberately used as a means of wooing sleep, graver forms of literature may be chosen.