

# SUMMERTIME... AND READING BECKONS

*The students have dispersed, the report cards are long now in the mail, the last faculty meeting has concluded: It is summer. For most teachers, other responsibilities and summer jobs quickly move in to fill the space. But even the most burdened get some vacation. And for all of us, there is something about the season—ingrained most likely during childhood when summer carried a magical aura of endless time—that gives a sense of respite: time away from the usual routine; rest; a chance for the mind and body to wander. And in our heads we've been carrying around that list of books we haven't had time for. All that is required is the wherewithal to ward off that nagging little voice that calls us from reading to attend to life's perennial chores. Should I be drifting off with a book when the grass needs mowing, the closets are still a clutter, and the health insurance forms are piling up? The quotes, notes, and anecdotes that follow answer that question. The mind and spirit need time to replenish themselves. Other things will, at least for a while, have to take a lesser place in line.*

*The items that follow are taken from The Delights of Reading,\* a bountiful collection assembled from a lifetime of fond association with books and reading by Otto L. Bettmann. Forced to leave his post as a rare-book librarian at the State Library in Berlin after*

\*Published by David R. Godine, Publisher, Inc. Copyright © 1987 by Otto L. Bettmann. Reprinted with permission.

*Hitler's rise, Dr. Bettmann relocated in the United States in 1935 and founded the famous Bettmann Archive in New York. The Delights of Reading, as Daniel J. Boorstein notes in his foreword to the book, "offers us the opportunity to share the delight of eloquent, ironic, witty people of all sorts and from all ages." Enjoy... and keep reading!* —Editor



Every man who knows how to read has it in his power to magnify himself, to multiply the ways in which he exists, to make his life full, significant, and interesting.

—Aldous Huxley



You can practice the art of empathy in all the novels of Jane Austen and it is this daily practice that we all need, or we will never be good at living, as without practice we will never be good at playing the piano.

—Fay Weldon



Reading—the best state yet to keep absolute loneliness at bay.

—William Styron



Your family sees you as a lazy lump lying on the couch, propping a book up on your stomach, never realizing that you are really in the midst of an African safari that has just been charged by elephants, or in the drawing room of a large English country house interrogating the butler about the body

discovered on the Aubusson carpet.

Reading is an escape, an education, a delving into the brain of another human being on such an intimate level that every nuance of thought, every snapping of synapse, every slippery desire of the author is laid open before you like, well, a book.

—Cynthia Heimel



Books are the carriers of civilization. Without books, history is silent, literature dumb, science crippled, thought and speculation at a standstill. They are engines of change, windows on the world, "lighthouses" (as a poet said) "erected in the sea of time."

—Barbara W. Tuchman



We have preserved the Book, and the Book has preserved us.

—David Ben-Gurion



I knew a gentleman who was so good a manager of his time that he would not even lose that small portion of it which the calls of nature obliged him to pass in the necessary-house; but gradually went through all the Latin poets in those moments.

—Lord Chesterfield



When Sir Robert Walpole was dismissed from all his employments he retired to Houghton and walked into the library. Pulling down a book and holding it some minutes to his eyes, he burst into tears. "I



have led a life of business so long," said he, "that I have lost my taste for reading; and now—what shall I do?"

—*The Oxford Book of Literary Anecdotes*

I cannot think of a greater blessing than to die in one's own bed, without warning or discomfort, on the last page of the new book that we most wanted to read.

—*John Russell*

Very young children eat their books, literally devouring their contents. This is one reason for the scarcity of first editions of *Alice in Wonderland* and other favorites of the nursery.

—*A.S.W. Rosenbach*

*Abraham Lincoln:*

"The things I want to know are in books. My best friend is the man who will get me a book I ain't read" ... Since early youth he was possessed by a passion for books and borrowed any he could lay his hands on "in a radius of fifty miles." He kept with him even when working in the field some books to read during periods of rest.... When he traveled over the circuit, he often carried with him a volume of Shakespeare to read during spare moments.

—*M.L. Houser*

Harry Truman was one of our most bookish presidents. "Ken McCormick of Doubleday remem-

bers going up to see him at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel after Truman had left the White House. He arrived early in the morning and the President wasn't up yet, but Mrs. Truman said, 'Go right into his bedroom—he'd love to see you, Ken.'

So Ken walked in, and there was the President, the former President, sitting in a big chair with two stacks of new books on either side of his chair. Ken said, 'Mr. President, as a publisher, I'm so pleased to see that you're buying all those books. I suppose you read yourself to sleep at night.' He said, 'No, young man, I read myself awake.'

—*David McCullough*

Instead of going to Paris to attend lectures, go to the public library, and you won't come out for twenty years, if you really wish to learn.

—*Leo Tolstoy*

If truth is not to be found in the British Museum...where is truth?

—*Virginia Woolf*

The owner of a country house was showing some visitors his superb library. "Do you ever lend books?" he was asked. "No," he replied promptly, "only fools lend books." Then, waving his hand to a many shelved section filled with handsomely bound volumes, he added, "All those books once belonged to fools."

—*Holbrook Jackson*

Our journalism forces us to take an interest in some fresh triviality every day, whereas only three or four books in a lifetime give us anything that is of importance.

—*Marcel Proust*

There is no frigate like a book  
To take us lands away,  
Nor any coursers like a page  
Of prancing poetry.

—*Emily Dickinson*

G.K. Chesterton was once asked what books he would most like to have with him if he were stranded on a desert island. "*Thomas's Guide to Practical Shipbuilding*," he replied.

Every burned book enlightens the world.

—*Ralph Waldo Emerson*

Thomas Paine, "the rebellious staymaker," had arrived in America in 1774, a self-educated and penniless Quaker. He wrote *Common Sense* after the battle of Lexington to prove that independence and a republican government were feasible. His stirring tract, *The Crisis*, was written by firelight while serving under General Washington. Looking back, Paine reflected, "It was the cause of America that made me an author."

—*Bernard Smith*

God wrote it...I took his dictation.

—*Harriet Beecher Stowe*