

## A Traveler's Spare Time

### Some Advice

Calvin D. Wilson, writing in *The Sample Case*, says that the commercial traveler's leisure differs from that of men located at home. He who lives in one place has the evenings in his house or in his office; he has hours he can count on. The traveling man's unoccupied seasons are in small change, waiting for trains, or on railroad rides or buggy trips across country or in his hotel room.

Yet he has many unemployed minutes, which, in a week, make hours, as dimes and quarters make dollars. What can he do with these that they may count for something in his success? He can do many things, according to his temperament, health, stage of culture and circumstances. No detailed rules will suit everyone, but general suggestions may prove helpful and each can pick and choose according to his situation. If one does not have a surplus of energy, if he has to save up his vital forces in order to concentrate them when in action, it behooves him to seize the idle moments for rest, to sit still in the depot, to doze on the cars, to retire early to his hotel room. Yet even many of the less well-equipped men physically might be benefitted by change of mental occupation, according to the present belief that what we often need is not so much repose as the exercise of another set of faculties.

Doubtless, traveling men, as well as many others, lose much by often failing to have in their pockets notebooks for ideas, suggestions, plans. Oliver Wendell Holmes said, "No man ever yet caught the reins of a thought save as it galloped by him." It is an invaluable practice to have at hand blank book and pencil, and to get into the habit of seizing the reins of thought as they gallop by. Many of these, perhaps most of them, may prove worthless or impracticable, but in any case you have the ideas written down for examination and scrutiny at leisure. The man with the notebook will soon find he is having more bright ideas than came to him formerly. Then he preserves the facts that come to him by the eye or ear for inspection; he is not trusting to memory which may fail to bring back accurately what he wants when he wants it. The notebook habit causes him to put his ideas into somewhat better shape than if he leaves them unformulated and floating in his mind. The notebook helps him to learn the value of his own thoughts. It gives him a record also of his own ponderings and experiences that may have in the future a larger value than he now perceives. If he saves his thoughts thus, records his observations, while waiting for trains or shut in his hotel room and studies these jottings, he will probably find some diamonds among the pebbles. He may have jotted down in two minutes the idea that proves the germ of a larger future. In times when no new ideas come, the moments may be well spent in looking over the notes already made. Such a course soon comes to have an interest of its own and is a pleasant occupation. It takes away the feeling of wasting time and the spirit of impatience at delays.

There is another line of mental effort, for which odd moments may be utilized, the result of which may be of special value to traveling men who are able to follow it. This is the learning of a new language. No one needs to be more than reminded that in such a country as ours with its mixed population the knowledge of other languages than English is of every-day value. This is true particularly of traveling men, many of whom are

carried by their business into communities where a language other than English is commonly spoken.

Spare minutes tell wonderfully in the acquiring of a new language. The mind comes to it as a change and so with fresh interest. The little learned in a fragmentary way gets in time to be fixed in the memory. Nearly any one can get a speaking acquaintance with German, French or Spanish, if he sets himself about it in the right way. A beginning can be made by the use of such little books as are to be gotten in almost any book store. These appear under such titles as "How to Speak German Without a Teacher." Any librarian or book dealer can give the information. Something at least may be acquired in this manner, and such a book may be carried about and conned anywhere at odd times. A few weeks of this study will bring a man along to a point where he will see what further help he needs. If he can be in one place long enough to get the assistance of a teacher, so much the better. Presently he will be reading German or French books on his journeys and talking in these languages on his travels to any who understand them. In due time through use of spare time, he will be equipped for a wider field of employment. The ambitious traveling man who has gotten a working knowledge of one foreign language will not be likely to stop there. It is a general experience that the learning of other languages becomes much easier after the first one.

Reading with a purpose, for some definite end, is, of course, a universally desirable use of spare time. This may or may not be apparently of immediately available import, yet may further us greatly. President Roosevelt has stated that he is fond of reading in his leisure hours the history of the dismemberment of the empire of Alexander the Great. This seems a rather remote subject from American politics; and yet the completed record of the causes and changes that disintegrated one of the greatest empires of ancient times afford a picture in which to study the perils of modern society.

Cecil Rhodes, the great empire builder of South Africa, was a constant reader of Gibbon's "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire," and doubtless thereby had his mind enlarged to understand the scope of the problems of the British Empire.

The intellectual horizon of the traveling man, whose actual business of selling goods may seem quite disconnected from general knowledge, will unquestionably be widened by the reading of history, for example. The wider and stronger his mind, provided he does not sink into a book worm, the better he can do business. He will have a clearer and saner judgment. When reading is connected with daily activity there is little peril of its making men impractical. He might take up an elaborate history of business from its beginning to its present developments. Still better, if he aims at culture, would it be to plan a course of reading such as would cover all the most important subjects, history, ethics, political economy, finance and so on. At the end of a few years, by use of spare time alone, he would have furnished himself with all the general facts that any man in any occupation may have gained. He should be discreet in his newspaper and magazine reading.

If one has a particular bent, he should follow it if it is along lines that promise development. The man of inventive turn may, in his odd moments, note and work out some needed invention. The man of mechanical mind