

### XIII

#### *Keep Going!*

Once you get up steam in the old boiler, scheme to use all of it before closing down. This common-sense rule of the engineer applies to the human body quite as strictly as to engines of steel. But it is easy to misinterpret.

Do you need hours to warm up to a task? If so, you will gain much by arranging your schedule so as to keep under way, full steam, until your energies are spent. Many warm up quickly, hence they can stop early and often without waste. All others ought to plan for long stretches of peak performance.

Beware of twisting this to mean that, when warmed up, very short rest intervals are to be avoided. You may drop work for five, ten, or fifteen minutes now and then, provided that you do not lose your stride and cool off. You are exactly like a steam engine or a gasoline motor in this respect. Once you heat up the power unit, it remains warm for some time; and during this time, brief stops are quite all right. It may require half an hour in winter to get your automobile to the point of pulling smoothly; but once it does so, you may shut

off the motor at odd moments without making it hard to start again.

Another way of guiding you in this same matter is to consider your first efforts as a running start in a hurdle race or a high jump. Have you ever watched amateurs experimenting with the high jump? Usually they begin with an absurdly long running start. They may go back 150 feet from the bar and run as hard as they can toward it. They waste much energy in this manner. Here we see the other side of the technique of warming up. The unskillful tend to spend needless time and energy in getting under way. This is partly due, of course, to the fact that, in the performance of the major task, they use much more energy than the skillful do; but it is mainly due to sheer lack of practice in warming up. Here is a thumbnail sketch of a literary amateur who has thrown away most of his energies through clumsy take-offs.

This gentleman—whose name, I suspect, is Legion—calls himself an author. He really is a running starter who exhausts himself on the take-off. For many years he has drudged away at writing essays and short stories. In this time he has sold perhaps enough MSS. to keep him in bread and butter, underwear, toothpicks, and an authors' club. But the income tax officials know him not. And here is why.

Bravely he arises around eight and by nine sits down at his faithful typewriter, ready

for his day's toil. He arranges every chair and window shade to a millimeter. He brushes off his desk and sorts all his papers. He inserts a sheet in the typewriter and makes ready. Then? Well, usually he stares for a few minutes at the blank paper, then gets up and paces the floor, hands clasped behind him. Presently he begins talking aloud to himself. He is trying to compose something. Seldom does anything good result. So he seizes a pencil and scribbles notes on a scrap of paper. Soon we see him walking around the house, as if trying to raise his body temperature. Ten minutes he walks—or even thirty. Then he picks up a book and reads aimlessly for a while. In despair he turns to letter writing. He cleans up his tray of unanswered mail. Thus perhaps an hour or two. And now he plunges toward the goal somewhat feverishly. He curses under his breath. He knocks out pages on his typewriter with great clatter and sweat. Noon, and his fingers pause, while his eye runs over the work. All wrong! All wrong! He must begin after lunch, "when he feels warmed up to the task." Despite years of struggle, he goes on wasting half a day thus; and so frittering away a sizable fraction of his life.

I strongly suspect that he ought never to have tried the literary career. The human waste is shocking; and, so far as I can judge, his achievements will never survive the first read-

ing they get at the hands of magazine buyers. A moment of flimsy entertainment, and they have vanished.

To accomplish any task, learn the art of persistence. Keep everlastingly at it. High persistence, or drive (as most psychologists choose to call it), is the result of many inner forces. Its origins lie far down in the obscurest structure of nerve and muscle. Observe the subtle changes in a man's drive as he grows older, or when he falls sick, or after he has suffered a serious physical injury.

Each nerve cell stores up its own chemicals for work in its own peculiar fashion. (Physiologists call this stuff chromatin, just to have some label for it; but they haven't the remotest idea what it is.) When the nerves work, they discharge impulses into the muscles; and there again we find chemical changes going on, some of which serve to intensify and prolong the work done while some others weaken and retard it. What causes the manufacture of each such chemical? When we know this, we shall perceive the foundations of man power.

In this year of grace, all we know is that some of the endocrine glands, when stimulated by certain brain centers, speed up and slow down the production of those substances. Probably they do not manufacture the energy-stuff, but they regulate the job somehow. The thyroid gland, for example, acts as a governor for the whole body. Let it function too vigorously, and

the body runs wild. Slow it down close to a stand-still, and every muscle and nerve goes dead.

Various activities also produce patterns of persistence, good and bad alike. Habits surely play an important part. Structures change with use. A man who persists at certain lines of work or play changes his nerve and muscle; sometimes this change makes it easier for him to persist along the same old line, and sometimes it blocks the drive completely while opening up new channels. A habit that is not suited to the worker's personal physiological equipment must eventually weaken its own drive.

Again, the thwarting of a drive often acts as a stimulus to it. When blocked, the drive somehow touches off fresh energies which mass behind it. Sometimes they overwhelm the original obstacle. Sometimes they cannot, and then they flow around it and find some new channel of discharge. Sometimes they cannot even flow around it, so they reverse; and then the individual withdraws, runs away, seeks a new environment beyond the reach of the hateful interference. Thus when we fight back, dodge, or flee.

Finally, high persistence always improves under favorable stimulation. Call this latter the environment, if you prefer. For it is an influence acting from without. Suppose that a youth craved to express himself in language: would he be likely to spend a year writing a

novel unless he lived in a society which read and admired fiction? Hardly! In the kingdom of the dumb, not even the king converses well. And if ever he did, would he not soon lose interest in table talk? Any drive which fails to yield its appropriate satisfaction tends to weaken. And most drives are aimed at something which involves the attention, the approval, or the cash rewards due from other people. Hence they "obey" the law of supply and demand.