

yourself. If you know that you are going to work when you get up in the morning, if you know you are not by any possible chance going to permit yourself to escape that work, why then, you have a mental hurdle behind you. Nobody really likes to work; every writer I know has to subdue a desire to procrastinate; at the same time, stronger than your wish not to work is your wish to work. Try, when you have a vacation from writing, to keep yourself from writing and see how far you get. You'll find yourself thinking plot, visualizing characters, making mental notes of people and scenes around you, writing great long letters to everybody you know, and sneaking to your typewriter at the hours when you've been accustomed to write and writing a little of this and a little of that. Writing is a habit and, once it has you, you can't escape it. But the habit is a help, too.

It seems to me that four to six hours a day is a good stretch of work. You will not write constantly all that time; mornings when things seem to click, you'll get your stint done early, other days you'll rewrite, plan next year's garden and tomorrow's menus—do everything but write until you finally realize that you've got to stop thinking of everything else and get down to work. It would be a help if we could learn to concentrate with the ease and dispatch with which we turn on an electric light; but we can't, and the most we can expect of self-discipline is to keep us glued to our desks until a specified stint has been done. You may find that what you've written on a bad day has to be rewritten; but I regret to say that it has been my experience that what I've written on what seemed a good day at the time is just as likely to need rewriting.

My day seems to work out best by doing my writing in the morning, having lunch in my study and then in the afternoon doing my letters. This gives you late afternoon and evening free for walks, garden, hobbies, housekeeping, music, theatres, people or whatever interests you. Reading with a writer seems to be as firmly fixed a habit as that of writing. Letters are a kind of by-product, but an inevitable one; they present their own special problem; especially if you can't, as I can't, dictate with any satisfaction; I do all my own letters myself but it does take time.

Of course there are times when you can't limit your work to so many hours a day; if you have said that you'll have a story in the editor's hands at a certain time, then you'll do well to get it there by that time and work all day and all night, too, if necessary. As