

## 19<sup>th</sup> Century literary non-fiction

### Source B

This is an extract from a magazine article published in 1852. *The Leisure Hour: A Family Journal of Instruction and Recreation* was a general interest magazine produced by the Religious Tract Society. Here the author offers hints about how readers should use their 'free' (non-working) time.

### Hints about Timethrift

It is a common remark that time flies, and ought to be improved. We fear, however, that few who make the observation are really aware how much it involves, and how far they themselves come short of it. Most persons do not rightly estimate the worth of the smaller fragments of their time. They have large ideas of what may be accomplished in years and months, but of the value of minutes, or even hours, they seem unconscious. Yet it is only by  
5 diligently seizing and employing these, that we can secure from waste the longer periods. Why is this truth so often and so strangely overlooked? Many people act as though it had never occurred to them that life is made up of days, and days of moments. They are, perhaps, not chargeable with gross indolence\*, or habitual neglect of duty. But in the  
10 intervals of needful occupation they loiter, dream, or trifle; and, at the close of the year, wondering they have done so little, and failed to accomplish so many of their plans, they complain of the shortness of time, the multiplicity of their engagements, or the peculiar hindrances they have sustained; in short, throw the blame on anything or anybody rather than themselves. Might not this not be prevented? We think it might, and will try to show  
15 wherein, as we suppose, the fault consists. Take one or two familiar cases.

A weary merchant who at seven o'clock has returned from his desk and counting-house in the city, to a comfortable villa at Brixton or Highgate, exclaims, as he throws himself upon his sofa:- "Well, I wish I had done with the drudgery\* of accounts; I have no time for self-improvement, or doing good to others; all my energies seem absorbed in money-getting."

20 "Surely my dear," replies his wife, "you are not so badly off in this respect after all; you have several hours in the evening."

"Yes but what are they worth when one is tired and harassed with a day's fag\* at office? Those who can command all their time may accomplish almost what they will; but what can a man do who has only an hour or two at night, and part of that time taken up with meals and  
25 chit-chat?"

While this worthy man is thus complaining he might be reading to his wife a chapter in some interesting book; writing a letter to a friend; performing if he have a talent that way, some little piece of handicraft skill; or giving his children some pleasant and familiar lesson, which would increase their stock of knowledge, and draw out more strongly their affections towards  
30 himself.

Take another illustration. A young wife and mother, amiable and kind, but not particularly thoughtful, is really sorry that when her husband returns home in the evening, he should so often have to complain of the disorder of the house; of the perverseness of the two children, who seem to set parental authority at defiance; and of her own inability, from family cares, to  
35 comply with his wishes for a little reading or music. Her sister, however, with three times as many children, and who, perhaps, if in that station of life, often lends a hand in the shop besides, manages to get through *her* day's work in half the time. This excites Lucy's astonishment, and prompts the query, "What can be the reason Jane, that with all you have upon your hands, you never seem in confusion, and manage reading, and many other things  
40 for which I never have the time. I wish you would teach me your secret."

"Really, Lucy," is the smiling answer, "I am no such prodigy\*. My secret is soon told. You can try it, if you please, and with as much success. When I rise in the morning, knowing I have certain duties before me which *must* be done, I try to put these in the best order, and keep for the intervals of leisure which are sure to occur, those other matters which I should  
45 *like* to accomplish; such as reading, writing, a call of charity, or a visit to a friend. By this means, and by taking that first which is most pressing, or best fits in with the space at command, I contrive to keep my children and household in order, and when the day's work is over, to enjoy a quiet evening with my husband."

The case of these sisters is, we apprehend, a common one.

## Glossary

- \* indolence – laziness
- \* drudgery – hard, dull, or tiring work
- \* fag – hard work
- \* prodigy – a person with exceptional qualities or abilities

This extract is from "Hints about Timethrift" by author unknown in Volume 1 No. 15 of *The Leisure Hour* magazine (8<sup>th</sup> April 1852) and the full text of the article can be found online at <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.a0006340913?urlappend=%3Bseq=243>

This resource is brought to you by the Diseases of Modern Life project at the University of Oxford, which is supported by the [European Research Council](#) under the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme (FP/2007-2013) under Grant Agreement Number 340121.