

# Half the World Waits for the Others

**P**UNCTUALITY is a lonely habit. Those who make an effort to arrive a few minutes early in order to be on time frequently find they have time to meditate or to fume while waiting for others.

It seems about half of the world must spend time waiting for the rest of the world to get up and catch up. Some arise early and others are late sleepers. Those who are habitually prompt wait on those who are habitually late.

Punctuality has been defined as the art of guessing accurately just how late the other party may be. If you can manage to reach the appointed place first, no matter how tardy, you win.

Shakespeare wrote "Better be three hours too soon than one minute too late," a thought that has been paraphrased in insurance advertisements. That may be all right for those who take along a book to read or other ways to utilize their time while waiting.

Back in the days when stage coaches were in use, people didn't worry much if one showed up a cou-

ple of days late on a long cross country run. Traffic delays were common even if vehicles were sparse.

When passenger trains came into use customers became impatient if the tardiness was a few hours. When airplanes made it possible to reach distant points in a couple of hours, a few minutes delay became significant on the ground or in the air.

Thus time stands as a matter of relativity. It may make a great deal of difference whether you wait on the boss for 15 minutes or if the boss has to wait on you for 15 minutes.

When radio and its heyday entertainment programs were tailored to the second, the medium is not so precise. Often if you watch a program on one station to its end you may miss the beginning of another. Sometimes you wait for a start.

Many business appointments are merely approximations of time. Because doctors may be unable to anticipate how long they must spend with various patients, an appointed time may be only a specified waiting period for a patient or group of patients.

In a new book, "Idols for Destruction," Herbert Scholssberg discusses a type of historicism that defies time, making it an idol.

"As a matter of simple historical observation, it would be hard to find a common saying as implausible as 'We can't turn back the clock,'" he wrote, adding, "We could list examples of this phenomenon endlessly: alternations between democracy and authoritarianism, high and low hemlines, moral permissiveness and prudery, war and peace, and so on."

He also might have mentioned promptness and lateness, because some try to be on time and others just try to turn back the clock.

A Dallas internist who visited Oklahoma City recently expressed concern about increasing numbers of people who are suffering from what he called "hurry sickness." He said they have too much sensitivity to the passage of time, which can lead to an early grave.

Even in death punctual, people will wait on late arrivals.