

CHAPTER XXVII

LIFE ON THE ROAD

"Do you not get tired of traveling?" many times Grandfather was asked. To which he was wont to reply: "I would not dare to, for then I should feel sorry for myself. Do you ask yourself whether you like to shave every morning? You better not ask yourself the question. Suppose the answer should be 'No'? Then what a fix you would be in."

As a matter of fact, Grandfather is convinced that he did not dislike to travel because he always spent his vacations traveling. Grandfather was well fitted physically and temperamentally for a life on the road. Grandfather was short of stature (5 feet, 4 inches) and hence fitted comfortably into a Pullman berth, into short beds and into short bathtubs and small taxicabs. He was endowed with a strong constitution that stood the wear and tear of jolty rides on train and by auto and of irregular meals and of broken hours of sleep.

When food was poor, he ate sparingly and made up when a good restaurant was found. He ate a light breakfast of fruit, toast and hot water and sometimes bacon. At any time it happened to be convenient, he ate a light lunch--usually fruit, a bowl of half milk and half cream with crackers and lettuce or celery. For dinner it made little difference whether at 5 or 8:30, he ate a hearty meal, usually lamb or fowl or fish with vegetables, also fruit in some form and always hot water.

Grandfather did not drink coffee, tea or stimulants of any kind and did not use tobacco in any form. It seemed to him the part of good judgment not to acquire a habit which he saw some men struggling hard to overcome.

Temperamentally he was fitted for a life on the road. He did not feel sorry for himself when meals were poor, rooms unpleasant and vehicles uncomfortable. To these things he paid little attention. He did not mind being alone. He could always amuse himself by a walk in the park, a visit to an art gallery, an hour or so in a library. He could spend an evening pleasantly doing a bit of work or just writing in a lighter vein just for fun. "The Parlins" resulted from Grandfather's - perhaps you would say - weird way of amusing himself.

Grandfather could sleep any time under almost any conditions. The evening before this chapter was written, for example, Grandfather took a taxi from the suburbs through the early evening traffic of Cleveland to a down-town hotel for dinner. Since Grandfather was to make a speech, he decided to take a little nap and the next he knew the taxi driver was shaking him and telling him that he had arrived. The ability to sleep in a taxi between speeches was a life saver on many occasions.

When Grandfather was in school work, he traveled some years as much as 25,000 miles, taking a party to Europe, meeting lecture engagements, attending teachers conventions, looking up new teachers and traveling with athletic and declamation contestors. During the past twenty-one years with The Curtis Publishing Company, he traveled an average of about 1,000 miles per week or 50,000 miles per year, or a total of approximately 1,000,000 miles for the twenty-one years.

Had it not been that his physical and temperamental equipment especially fitted Grandfather for travel, he is confident that he could not have traveled so many miles and showed up smiling at sixty quite happy to continue his life on the road.

Meanwhile Grandmother had to bear the brunt of running the home,

and much credit is due her. She was always courageous and never wept over Grandfather's trips. "It is lucky," said Charles, "that mother is not like Mrs. Youker (the wife of one of Grandfather's assistants). We would not get her dried off from one time to the next."

Grandfather never encouraged any fuss about his coming and going. "Where is your father?" asked a neighbor of Grace. "I don't know," Grace, according to the neighbor, replied, "I guess he went to Chicago, perhaps it was Detroit. No, I think I heard him say something about Boston. Oh, I don't know - he went somewhere."

Grandfather, however, gave serious thought to the problem of his family and worked out a plan somewhat unique but which proved satisfactory. Responsibility for correct conduct was placed on each individual. "I cannot police you," Grandfather said to Charles and George. "You will have to police yourselves." "Parlin, I can't understand it," said a neighbor, "you let your boys use your automobile and allow them spending money and seem to pay little attention to where they go and they take care of themselves. I watch my boy very carefully, always sit up to let him in at night and I am frank to tell you that I am having a hard time with him." "I guess that is the trouble," said Grandfather. "You do not give him a chance to take care of himself."

It did not seem practical to have an elaborate home. Grandfather held himself ready for emergency calls and seldom issued or accepted social invitations. He and Grandmother had had a sufficiency of social life in Wausau and Grandfather felt he had fully executed his civic duties by his years of school life. So Grandfather never felt a sense of deprivation from lack of social life.

Meanwhile Grandmother worked out her own career and led a very

active and a very useful life. For many years she had charge of the Scientific Temperance Instruction work in all the Philadelphia schools. She received no pay for this work, but applied herself as zealously to the task as if she had received a good salary. She traveled all over the city, visiting all kinds of schools, conducting essay contests, presenting prizes and talking to the children. She established many pleasant acquaintanceships with teachers and supervisors and, at one time, probably knew more about Philadelphia schools than anyone except the regular school supervisors.

She was also for many years head of the Woman's Auxiliary of the First M. E. Church of Germantown. This church, famous in Methodism for its leadership and its philanthropies, in the personnel of its membership, was unusual. Its members ranged from a group of multi-millionaires down to people who would starve were it not for church assistance.

Grandmother was especially fitted to be head of the woman's organization of such a church, for having grown up in a smaller city where the school principal was the social equal of all - both rich and poor - she had developed none of the class consciousness which most city people have. She was accepted socially by the wealthiest families of the church and felt perfectly at ease at their functions. On the other hand, she could hold the hand of an old lady, dying in poverty, and do something to make her last days more comfortable.

Because of this rare range of social qualities Grandmother seemed indispensable as the head of the Woman's Auxiliary. When after years of service she thought it best to retire, she had to resort to the device of having a constitution adopted which provided that no one could hold an office for more than three years. She had to remain for another three years but ultimately was retired through constitutional limitations. At last she surrendered the title of president, but remained an active worker.

Grandmother also took an active interest in the Woman's Club of Germantown - an outstanding organization. On one occasion, being scheduled for a book review, she reviewed Volume I of "The Parlins". Was not that funny? Would you not have liked to have heard her? Grandfather surely would. Oh, yes! Grandfather knows it was a nervy thing for himself and Grandmother to write a big fat book all about themselves and he knows it was nervy for Grandmother to review her very own book written about her very own self. The very thought of that room full of women - they had to bring in extra chairs to accommodate the crowd - listening with sober faces while Grandmother reviewed a huge volume written by herself about herself caused Grandfather to laugh so long and so hard when he heard it that he almost had hysterics.

But in the advertising business we learn that nerve is one of the factors which makes the world go around and no good advertising man or his wife is ashamed to demonstrate that he or she has a full share of this precious article.

Besides, don't you see, Grandmother told the Club how the book was written for her grandchildren and then don't you see the ladies must almost have wept with joy at the thought of Grandmother's devotion to you? Had the ladies only have known you, they would have known that Grandfather and Grandmother just could not have done otherwise than write a book for you.

The home was simple and automatic - automatic gas heater, electric range, automatic hot water heater, electric refrigeration, a maid, almost automatic, who came every morning to look at the house and stay if needed.

After the children were gone, Grandmother and Grandfather could at any moment write a note on the blackboard to the maid, lock the door and be off for a week or a month or more with nothing left behind to worry about.

Hence, with less "things" to tie them down, the family could get the compensation of a traveling man's home - namely, travel - all the children had a trip abroad, all had a trip to the Pacific Coast. Before she was twenty-one, Grace had made three trips to Europe, two to the West Indies, one to Yellowstone Park, Pacific Coast, Alaska and Hawaii.

In such a life of travel and of individualism, how could a consciousness of family solidarity be maintained? Well, first of all, when Grandfather was home, he made it a point to be really home - i.e. to be home in spirit as well as just there in corporeal form, and he had a hunch that the family appreciated him better when he was there on week-ends than they would if he had been home to every meal but with his thoughts wandering elsewhere and grouchy every time someone interrupted his musings.

To maintain family spirit, Grandfather did two things. First of all, when Grandfather was home at a week-end, each member of the family in turn was encouraged to give an account of the week's experience and accomplishment. Grandfather always made it a point to be interested in whatever each child was doing and to furnish encouragement and, if need be, some money to help out on every worth-while project.

On the other hand, Grandfather aimed not to be "indulgent" and not to spoil his children with too much money. In the first place, he did not have money to use thoughtlessly and in the second place he believed a child should learn to understand the effort and sacrifice which money represented.

In the second place, Grandfather concluded that a child's recollection of his home life largely centered around red-letter days - hence Grandfather decided to make more than usual efforts to make birthdays and holidays memorable occasions. At Christmas more than usual effort and money were used to make the day one to be remembered - Volume I of "The Parlins"

was planned and executed as a Christmas surprise, the entire work being done so secretly that no member of the family suspected what Grandmother and Grandfather had prepared and put into the mysterious box which was sent to Ruth's nearly a month before Christmas.

Grandfather and Grandmother feel that they have been blessed with a fine family of children and grandchildren and one of their greatest joys has been that the family have grown together in spirit as the years have gone by. To us it seemed that the family orchestra concert epitomized a family endeavor toward ideals and solidarity. Many thought it remarkable that all could play. One thought it more remarkable that four children and three in-laws would all be willing to play in the same orchestra.

As Grandfather received congratulations on that concert and the fine family spirit it evinced, he had no regret that he had spent his life on the road and had left his family largely on their own responsibility. They had measured up to the responsibilities placed upon them. They had done a grand job of bringing up themselves.