

THE LENGTH OF A MINUTE.

By J. H. SMYTHE.

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Most people if asked what was the longest minute they ever spent would probably answer that there is no difference in the length of minutes and none exceed sixty seconds.

Literally speaking that is so, for as an actual measurement of the length or rather duration of a minute, sixty seconds are the recognised number of divisions in a minute.

Yet there are times when sixty seconds seem an eternity. For instance, waiting for your bus on a cold, wet morning, the minutes seem more like hours and time flies on leaden wings, yet every minute was exactly sixty seconds.

I've heard it said that, that last minute before Zero hour must have been to the soldiers in the Great War, the longest sixty seconds of their life. Opinion however is divided about that, for some old soldiers will tell you that time passed all too quickly, when you were waiting to leave the comparative safety of the trenches and leap right into the inferno beyond. I must confess, I agree with them.

I've held the watch and the hands seemed to gallop that last minute. I had one experience however of an all too slow flight of time which I will never forget.

When I was working on a ranch in California it was part

of my duties to keep three windmills in good running order.

Well, one very windy day, a wind which came in terrific gusts, I went along to one of the mills to oil up the top running gear.

This particular mill required frequent lubrication as it was a rather ancient structure with badly worn bearings.

Well, I pulled down the brake lever at the bottom and started up oil can in hand.

Just as I reached the top and was stepping on to the small platform, I heard a loud crack and before I realised what had happened, the tail fan swung round like a flash and swept me off the platform.

The brake ratchet had snapped. Luckily I was facing the wind and just as I was going over the edge I managed to grab the tail arm and hang on for dear life, while the oil can rattled and bounced through the framework to the ground some sixty five feet below.

The sensation was indescribable, swaying there in space with disaster, fearful and shattering only a matter of seconds. As I hung there in desperation my past life seemed to be projected on to a screen and flashed before my mind's eye in a succession of vivid pictures. Incidents I had forgotten, my every deed, good or bad were all revealed with startling clarity.

It was as if my life account was being balanced and believe me the final reckoning was hardly in my favour.

Curiously enough, though I saw all this in my mind's eye, it was in a detached sort of way, for I was obsessed with the horrible thought that when I fell I would hit the framework of the mill just about twenty feet from the ground.

The thought of the consequences were sickening.

Now though it seemed to me that I had been hanging there for ages, actually it was only a matter of seconds from the time I was swept off, until another sudden gust blew me back over the platform again and I dropped to safety.

Yet in that short space of time I lived a whole nerve racking lifetime and the experience has convinced me that a minute, as reckoned by the clock, is much more than sixty seconds.

Yes, some minutes are far too long.

