

How To Crowd Worry Out Of Your Mind

I shall never forget the night, a few years ago, when Marion J. Douglas was a student in one of my classes. (I have not used his real name. He requested me,

for personal reasons, not to reveal his identity.) But here is his real story as he told it before one of our adult -education classes. He told us how tragedy had struck at his home, not once, but twice. The first time he had lost his five-yearold daughter, a child he adored. He and his wife thought they couldn't endure that first loss; but, as he said: "Ten months later, God gave us another little girl and she died in five days."

This double bereavement was almost too much to bear. "I couldn't take it," this father told us. "I couldn't sleep, I couldn't eat, I couldn't rest or relax. My nerves were utterly shaken and my confidence gone." At last he went to doctors; one recommended sleeping pills and another recommended a trip. He tried both, but neither remedy helped. He said: "My body felt as if it were encased in a vice, and the jaws of the vice were being drawn tighter and tighter." The tension of grief-if you have ever been paralysed by sorrow, you know what he meant.

"But thank God, I had one child left-a four-year-old son. He gave me the solution to my problem. One afternoon as I sat around feeling sorry for myself, he asked: 'Daddy, will you build a boat for me?' I was in no mood to

build a
boat; in fact, I was in no mood to do anything. But my son is a
persistent little
fellow! I had to give in.
"Building that toy boat took about three hours. By the time it was
finished, I
realised that those three hours spent building that boat were the first
hours of
mental relaxation and peace that I had had in months!
"That discovery jarred me out of my lethargy and caused me to do a
bit of
thinking-the first real thinking I had done in months. I realised that it
is difficult
to worry while you are busy doing something that requires planning
and
thinking. In my case, building the boat had knocked worry out of the
ring. So I
resolved to keep busy.
"The following night, I went from room to room in the house,
compiling a list of
jobs that ought to be done. Scores of items needed to be repaired:
bookcases,
stair steps, storm windows, window-shades, knobs, locks, leaky taps.
Astonishing as it seems, in the course of two weeks I had made a list
of 242
items that needed attention.
"During the last two years I have completed most of them. Besides, I
have filled
my life with stimulating activities. Two nights per week I attend
adult-education
classes in New York. I have gone in for civic activities in my home
town and I
am now chairman of the school board. I attend scores of meetings. I
help collect
money for the Red Cross and other activities. I am so busy now that

I have no
time for worry."

No time for worry! That is exactly what Winston Churchill said
when he was
working eighteen hours a day at the height of the war. When he was
asked if he
worried about his tremendous responsibilities, he said: "I'm too busy.

I have no
time for worry."

Charles Kettering was in that same fix when he started out to invent
a self-starter
for automobiles. Mr. Kettering was, until his recent retirement, vice-
president of
General Motors in charge of the world-famous General Motors
Research

Corporation. But in those days, he was so poor that he had to use the
hayloft of a
barn as a laboratory. To buy groceries, he had to use fifteen hundred
dollars that

his wife had made by giving piano lessons; later, had to borrow five
hundred

his wife had made by giving piano lessons; later, had to borrow five
hundred

dollars on his life insurance. I asked his wife if she wasn't worried at
a time like

that. "Yes," she replied, "I was so worried I couldn't sleep; but Mr.
Kettering

wasn't. He was too absorbed in his work to worry."

The great scientist, Pasteur, spoke of "the peace that is found in
libraries and

laboratories." Why is peace found there? Because the men in
libraries and

laboratories are usually too absorbed in their tasks to worry about
themselves.

Research men rarely have nervous breakdowns. They haven't time

for such
luxuries.

Why does such a simple thing as keeping busy help to drive out anxiety?

Because of a law-one of the most fundamental laws ever revealed by psychology. And that law is: that it is utterly impossible for any human mind, no matter how brilliant, to think of more than one thing at any given time. You don't

quite believe it? Very well, then, let's try an experiment.

Suppose you lean right back now, close your eyes, and try, at the same instant, to

think of the Statue of Liberty and of what you plan to do tomorrow morning. (Go ahead, try it.)

You found out, didn't you, that you could focus on either thought in turn, but

never on both simultaneously? Well, the same thing is true in the field of

emotions. We cannot be pepped up and enthusiastic about doing something

exciting and feel dragged down by worry at the very same time. One kind of

emotion drives out the other. And it was that simple discovery that enabled

Army psychiatrists to perform such miracles during the war.

When men came out of battle so shaken by the experience that they were called

"psychoneurotic", Army doctors prescribed "Keep 'em busy" as a cure.

Every waking minute of these nerve-shocked men was filled with activity-usually outdoor activity, such as fishing, hunting, playing ball, golf, taking

pictures, making gardens, and dancing. They were given no time for brooding

over their terrible experiences.

"Occupational therapy" is the term now used by psychiatry when work is prescribed as though it were a medicine. It is not new. The old Greek physicians were advocating it five hundred years before Christ was born! The Quakers were using it in Philadelphia in Ben Franklin's time. A man who visited a Quaker sanatorium in 1774 was shocked to see that the patients who visited a Quaker sanatorium in 1774 was shocked to see that the patients who were mentally ill were busy spinning flax. He thought these poor unfortunates were being exploited-until the Quakers explained that they found that their patients actually improved when they did a little work. It was soothing to the nerves.

Any psychiatrist will tell you that work-keeping busy- is one of the best anesthetics ever known for sick nerves. Henry W. Longfellow found that out for himself when he lost his young wife. His wife had been melting some sealingwax at a candle one day, when her clothes caught on fire. Longfellow heard her cries and tried to reach her in time; but she died from the burns. For a while, Longfellow was so tortured by the memory of that dreadful experience that he nearly went insane; but, fortunately for him, his three small children needed his attention. In spite of his own grief, Longfellow undertook to be father and mother to his children. He took them for walks, told them stories,

played games
with them, and immortalised their companionship in his poem *The Children's Hour*. He also translated Dante; and all these duties combined kept him so busy that he forgot himself entirely, and regained his peace of mind. As Tennyson declared when he lost his most intimate friend, Arthur Hallam: "I must lose myself in action, lest I wither in despair."
Most of us have little trouble "losing ourselves in action" while we have our noses to the grindstone and are doing our day's work. But the hours after work they are the dangerous ones. Just when we're free to enjoy our own leisure, and ought to be happiest-that's when the blue devils of worry attack us. That's when we begin to wonder whether we're getting anywhere in life; whether we're in a rut; whether the boss "meant anything" by that remark he made today; or whether we're getting bald.
When we are not busy, our minds tend to become a near-vacuum. Every student of physics knows that "nature abhors a vacuum". The nearest thing to a vacuum that you and I will probably ever see is the inside of an incandescent electric light bulb. Break that bulb-and nature forces air in to fill the theoretically empty space.
Nature also rushes in to fill the vacant mind. With what? Usually with emotions. Why? Because emotions of worry, fear, hate, jealousy, and envy are driven by primeval vigour and the dynamic energy of the jungle. Such

emotions are so violent that they tend to drive out of our minds all peaceful, nappy thoughts and emotions.

emotions.

James L. Mursell, professor of education, Teachers' College, Columbia, puts it very well when he says: "Worry is most apt to ride you ragged not when you are in action, but when the day's work is done. Your imagination can run riot then and bring up all sorts of ridiculous possibilities and magnify each little blunder.

At such a time," he continues, "your mind is like a motor operating without its

load. It races and threatens to burn out its bearings or even to tear itself to bits.

The remedy for worry is to get completely occupied doing something constructive."

But you don't have to be a college professor to realise this truth and put it into

practice. During the war, I met a housewife from Chicago who told me how she

discovered for herself that "the remedy for worry is to get completely occupied

doing something constructive." I met this woman and her husband in the diningcar while I was travelling from New York to my farm in Missouri. (Sorry I didn't

get their names-I never like to give examples without using names and street

addresses- details that give authenticity to a story.)

This couple told me that their son had joined the armed forces the day after Pearl

Harbour. The woman told me that she had almost wrecked her health

worrying
over that only son. Where was he? Was he safe? Or in action?
Would he be
wounded? Killed?
When I asked her how she overcame her worry, she replied: "I got
busy." She
told me that at first she had dismissed her maid and tried to keep
busy by doing
all her housework herself. But that didn't help much. "The trouble
was," she said,
"that I could do my housework almost mechanically, without using
my mind. So
I kept on worrying. While making the beds and washing the dishes I
realised I
needed some new kind of work that would keep me busy both
mentally and
physically every hour of the day. So I took a job as a saleswoman in
a large
department store.
"That did it," she said. "I immediately found myself in a whirlwind
of activity:
customers swarming around me, asking for prices, sizes, colours.
Never a second
to think of anything except my immediate duty; and when night
came, I could
think of nothing except getting off my aching feet. As soon as I ate
dinner, I fell
into bed and instantly became unconscious. I had neither the time
nor the energy
to worry."
She discovered for herself what John Cowper Powys meant when he
said, in *The*
She discovered for herself what John Cowper Powys meant when he
said, in *The*
Art of Forgetting the Unpleasant: "A certain comfortable security, a

certain
profound inner peace, a kind of happy numbness, soothes the nerves
of the
human animal when absorbed in its allotted task."
And what a blessing that it is so! Osa Johnson, the world's most
famous woman
explorer, recently told me how she found release from worry and
grief. You may
have read the story of her life. It is called I Married Adventure. If
any woman
ever married adventure, she certainly did. Martin Johnson married
her when she
was sixteen and lifted her feet off the sidewalks of Chanute, Kansas,
and set
them down on the wild jungle trails of Borneo. For a quarter of a
century, this
Kansas couple travelled all over the world, making motion pictures
of the
vanishing wild life of Asia and Africa. Back in America nine years
ago, they
were on a lecture tour, showing their famous films. They took a
plane out of
Denver, bound for the Coast. The plane plunged into a mountain.
Martin
Johnson was killed instantly. The doctors said Osa would never
leave her bed
again. But they didn't know Osa Johnson. Three months later, she
was in a wheel
chair, lecturing before large audiences. In fact, she addressed over a
hundred
audiences that season-all from a wheel chair. When I asked her why
she did it,
she replied: "I did it so that I would have no time for sorrow and
worry."
Osa Johnson had discovered the same truth that Tennyson had sung

about a century earlier: "I must lose myself in action, lest I wither in despair."

Admiral Byrd discovered this same truth when he lived all alone for five months in a shack that was literally buried in the great glacial ice-cap that covers the South Pole-an ice-cap that holds nature's oldest secrets-an ice-cap covering an unknown continent larger than the United States and Europe combined. Admiral Byrd spent five months there alone. No other living creature of any kind existed within a hundred miles. The cold was so intense that he could hear his breath freeze and crystallise as the wind blew it past his ears. In his book *Alone*, Admiral Byrd tells all about those five months he spent in bewildering and soulshattering darkness. The days were as black as the nights. He had to keep busy to preserve his sanity.

"At night," he says, "before blowing out the lantern, I formed the habit of blocking out the morrow's work. It was a case of assigning myself an hour, say, to the Escape Tunnel, half an hour to leveling drift, an hour to straightening up the fuel drums, an hour to cutting bookshelves in the walls of the food tunnel, and two hours to renewing a broken bridge in the man-hauling sledge. ...

"It was wonderful," he says, "to be able to dole out time in this way. It brought me an extraordinary sense of command over myself. ..." And he adds: "Without

that or an equivalent, the days would have been without purpose;
and without
purpose they would have ended, as such days always end, in
disintegration."

Note that last again: "Without purpose, the days would have ended,
as such days
always end, in disintegration."

If you and I are worried, let's remember that we can use good old-
fashioned
work as a medicine. That was said by no less an authority than the
late Dr.
Richard C. Cabot, formerly professor of clinical medicine at
Harvard. In his
book *What Men Live By*, Dr. Cabot says: "As a physician, I have
had the
happiness of seeing work cure many persons who have suffered
from trembling
palsy of the soul which results from overmastering doubts,
hesitations,
vacillation and fear. ... Courage given us by our work is like the self-
reliance
which Emerson has made for ever glorious."

If you and I don't keep busy-if we sit around and brood- we will
hatch out a
whole flock of what Charles Darwin used to call the "wibber
gibbers". And the
"wibber gibbers" are nothing but old-fashioned gremlins that will
run us hollow
and destroy our power of action and our power of will.
I know a business man in New York who fought the "wibber
gibbers" by getting
so busy that he had no time to fret and stew. His name is Tremper
Longman, and
his office is at 40 Wall Street. He was a student in one of my adult-
education

classes; and his talk on conquering worry was so interesting, so impressive, that I asked him to have supper with me after class; and we sat in a restaurant until long past midnight, discussing his experiences. Here is the story he told me:

"Eighteen years ago, I was so worried I had insomnia. I was tense, irritated, and jittery. I felt I was headed for a nervous breakdown.

"I had reason to be worried. I was treasurer of the Crown Fruit and Extract

Company, 418 West Broadway, New York. We had half a million dollars

invested in strawberries packed in gallon tins. For twenty years, we had been

selling these gallon tins of strawberries to manufactures of ice cream. Suddenly

our sales stopped because the big ice-cream makers, such as National Dairy and

Borden's, were rapidly increasing their production and were saving money and

time by buying strawberries packed in barrels.

"Not only were we left with half a million dollars in berries we couldn't sell, but

"Not only were we left with half a million dollars in berries we couldn't sell, but

we were also under contract to buy a million dollars more of strawberries in the

next twelve months! We had already borrowed \$350,000 from the banks. We

couldn't possibly pay off or renew these loans. No wonder I was worried!

"I rushed out to Watsonville, California, where our factory was located, and tried

to persuade our president that conditions had changed, that we were

facing ruin.

He refused to believe it. He blamed our New York office for all the trouble-poor salesmanship.

"After days of pleading, I finally persuaded him to stop packing more strawberries and to sell our new supply on the fresh berry market in San Francisco. That almost solved our problems. I should have been able to stop

worrying then; but I couldn't. Worry is a habit; and I had that habit.

"When I returned to New York, I began worrying about everything; the cherries

we were buying in Italy, the pineapples we were buying in Hawaii, and so on. I

was tense, jittery, couldn't sleep; and, as I have already said, I was heading for a nervous breakdown.

"In despair, I adopted a way of life that cured my insomnia and stopped my

worries. I got busy. I got so busy with problems demanding all my faculties that

I had no time to worry. I had been working seven hours a day. I now began

working fifteen and sixteen hours a day. I got down to the office every morning

at eight o'clock and stayed there every night until almost midnight. I took on new

duties, new responsibilities. When I got home at midnight, I was so exhausted

when I fell in bed that I became unconscious in a few seconds.

"I kept up this programme for about three months. I had broken the habit of

worry by that time, so I returned to a normal working day of seven or eight

hours. This event occurred eighteen years ago. I have never been troubled with insomnia or worry since then."

George Bernard Shaw was right. He summed it all up when he said: "The secret of being miserable is to have the leisure to bother about whether you are happy or not." So don't bother to think about it! Spit on your hands and get busy. Your blood will start circulating; your mind will start ticking -and pretty soon this whole positive upsurge of life in your body will drive worry from your mind. Get busy. Keep busy. It's the cheapest kind of medicine there is on this earth-and one of the best.

To break the worry habit, here is Rule 1: Keep busy. The worried person must lose himself in action, lest he wither in despair.

8

Don't Let the Beetles Get You Down

Here is a dramatic story that I'll probably remember as long as I live. It was told to me by Robert Moore, of 14 Highland Avenue, Maplewood, New Jersey.

"I learned the biggest lesson of my life in March, 1945," he said, "I learned it under 276 feet of water off the coast of Indo-China. I was one of eighty-eight men aboard the submarine Baya S.S. 318. We had discovered by radar that a

small Japanese convoy was coming our way. As daybreak approached, we submerged to attack. I saw through the periscope a Jap destroyer escort, a tanker, and a minelayer. We fired three torpedoes at the destroyer escort, but missed.

Something went haywire in the mechanics of each torpedo. The destroyer, not knowing that she had been attacked, continued on. We were getting ready to attack the last ship, the minelayer, when suddenly she turned and came directly at us. (A Jap plane had spotted us under sixty feet of water and had radioed our position to the Jap minelayer.) We went down to 150 feet, to avoid detection, and rigged for a depth charge. We put extra bolts on the hatches; and, in order to make our sub absolutely silent, we turned off the fans, the cooling system, and all electrical gear.

"Three minutes later, all hell broke loose. Six depth charges exploded all around us and pushed us down to the ocean floor -a depth of 276 feet. We were terrified.

To be attacked in less than a thousand feet of water is dangerous-less than five hundred feet is almost always fatal. And we were being attacked in a trifle more than half of five hundred feet of water -just about knee-deep, as far as safety was concerned. For fifteen hours, that Jap minelayer kept dropping depth charges.

If a depth charge explodes within seventeen feet of a sub, the concussion will

blow a hole in it. Scores of these depth charges exploded within fifty feet of us.

We were ordered 'to secure'- to lie quietly in our bunks and remain calm. I was so terrified I could hardly breathe. 'This is death,' I kept saying to myself over and over. 'This is death! ... This is death!' With the fans and cooling system turned off, the air inside the sub was over a hundred degrees; but I was so chilled with fear that I put on a sweater and a fur-lined jacket; and still I trembled with with fear that I put on a sweater and a fur-lined jacket; and still I trembled with cold. My teeth chattered. I broke out in a cold, clammy sweat. The attack continued for fifteen hours. Then ceased suddenly. Apparently the Jap minelayer had exhausted its supply of depth charges, and steamed away. Those fifteen hours of attack seemed like fifteen million years. All my life passed before me in review.

I remembered all the bad things I had done, all the little absurd things I had worried about. I had been a bank clerk before I joined the Navy. I had worried about the long hours, the poor pay, the poor prospects of advancement. I had worried because I couldn't own my own home, couldn't buy a new car, couldn't buy my wife nice clothes. How I had hated my old boss, who was always nagging and scolding! I remembered how I would come home at night sore and

grouchy and quarrel with my wife over trifles. I had worried about a scar on my forehead-a nasty cut from an auto accident.

"How big all these worries seemed years ago! But how absurd they seemed when depth charges were threatening to blow me to kingdom come. I promised myself then and there that if I ever saw the sun and the stars again, I would never, never worry again. Never! Never! I Never!!! I learned more about the art of living in those fifteen terrible hours in that submarine than I had learned by studying books for four years in Syracuse University."

We often face the major disasters of life bravely-and then let the trifles, the "pains in the neck", get us down. For example, Samuel Pepys tells in his Diary about seeing Sir Harry Vane's head chopped off in London. As Sir Harry mounted the platform, he was not pleading for his life, but was pleading with the executioner not to hit the painful boil on his neck!

That was another thing that Admiral Byrd discovered down in the terrible cold and darkness of the polar nights-that his men fussed more about the 'pains in the neck' than about the big things. They bore, without complaining, the dangers, the hardships, and the cold that was often eighty degrees below zero.

"But," says Admiral Byrd, "I know of bunkmates who quit speaking because each suspected the other of inching his gear into the other's allotted space; and I knew of one

who could not eat unless he could find a place in the mess hall out of sight of the

Fletcherist who solemnly chewed his food twenty-eight times before swallowing.

"In a polar camp," says Admiral Byrd, "little things like that have the power to

"In a polar camp," says Admiral Byrd, "little things like that have the power to

drive even disciplined men to the edge of insanity."

And you might have added, Admiral Byrd, that "little things" in marriage drive

people to the edge of insanity and cause "half the heartaches in the world."

At least, that is what the authorities say. For example, Judge Joseph Sabath of

Chicago, after acting as arbiter in more than forty thousand unhappy marriages,

declared: "Trivialities are at the bottom of most marital unhappiness"; and Frank

S. Hogan, District Attorney of New York County, says: "Fully half the cases in

our criminal courts originate in little things. Bar-room bravado, domestic

wrangling, an insulting remark, a disparaging word, a rude action—those are the

little things that lead to assault and murder. Very few of us are cruelly and

greatly wronged. It is the small blows to our self-esteem, the indignities, the little

jolts to our vanity, which cause half the heartaches in the world."

When Eleanor Roosevelt was first married, she "worried for days" because her

new cook had served a poor meal. "But if that happened now," Mrs. Roosevelt

says, "I would shrug my shoulders and forget it." Good. That is

acting like an
adult emotionally. Even Catherine the Great, an absolute autocrat,
used to laugh
the thing off when the cook spoiled a meal.
Mrs. Carnegie and I had dinner at a friend's house in Chicago. While
carving the
meat, he did something wrong. I didn't notice it; and I wouldn't have
cared even
if I had noticed it But his wife saw it and jumped down his throat
right in front of
us. "John," she cried, "watch what you are doing! Can't you ever
learn to serve
properly!"
Then she said to us: "He is always making mistakes. He just doesn't
try." Maybe
he didn't try to carve; but I certainly give him credit for trying to live
with her for
twenty years. Frankly, I would rather have eaten a couple of hot
dogs with
mustard-in an atmosphere of peace-than to have dined on Peking
duck and shark
fins while listening to her scolding.
Shortly after that experience, Mrs. Carnegie and I had some friends
at our home
for dinner. Just before they arrived, Mrs. Carnegie found that three
of the
napkins didn't match the tablecloth.
"I rushed to the cook," she told me later, "and found that the other
three napkins
had gone to the laundry. The guests were at the door. There was no
time to
change. I felt like bursting into tears! All I could think was: 'Why did
this stupid
change. I felt like bursting into tears! All I could think was: 'Why did
this stupid

mistake have to spoil my whole evening?' Then I thought-well-why let it? I went in to dinner, determined to have a good time. And I did. I would much rather our friends think I was a sloppy housekeeper," she told me, "than a nervous, badtempered one. And anyhow, as far as I could make out, no one noticed the napkins!"

A well-known legal maxim says: De minimis non curat lex- "the law does not concern itself with trifles." And neither should the worrier-if he wants peace of mind.

Much of the time, all we need to overcome the annoyance of trifles is to affect a shifting of emphasis-set up a new, and pleasurable, point of view in the mind.

My friend Homer Croy, who wrote *They Had to See Paris* and a dozen other books, gives a wonderful example of how this can be done. He used to be driven half crazy, while working on a book, by the rattling of the radiators in his New York apartment. The steam would bang and sizzle-and he would sizzle with irritation as he sat at his desk.

"Then," says Homer Croy, "I went with some friends on a camping expedition.

While listening to the limbs crackling in the roaring fire, I thought how much they sounded like the crackling of the radiators. Why should I like one and hate the other? When I went home I said to myself: "The crackling of the limbs in the fire was a pleasant sound; the sound of the radiators is about the

same-I'll go to
sleep and not worry about the noise.' And I did. For a few days I was
conscious
of the radiators; but soon I forgot all about them.
"And so it is with many petty worries. We dislike them and get into
a stew, all
because we exaggerate their importance. ..."
Disraeli said: "Life is too short to be little." "Those words," said
Andre Maurois
in This Week magazine, "have helped me through many a painful
experience:
often we allow ourselves to be upset by small things we should
despise and
forget. ... Here we are on this earth, with only a few more decades to
live, and
we lose many irreplaceable hours brooding over grievances that, in a
year's time,
will be forgotten by us and by everybody. No, let us devote our life
to worthwhile actions and feelings, to great thoughts, real affections
and enduring
undertakings. For life is too short to be little."
Even so illustrious a figure as Rudyard Kipling forgot at times that
"Life is too
short to be little". The result? He and his brother-in-law fought the
most famous
short to be little". The result? He and his brother-in-law fought the
most famous
court battle in the history of Vermont-a battle so celebrated that a
book has been
written about it: Rudyard Kipling's Vermont Feud.
The story goes like this: Kipling married a Vermont girl, Caroline
Balestier, built
a lovely home in Brattleboro, Vermont; settled down and expected
to spend the
rest of his life there. His brother-in-law, Beatty Balestier, became

Kipling's best
friend. The two of them worked and played together.
Then Kipling bought some land from Balestier, with the
understanding that
Balestier would be allowed to cut hay off it each season. One day,
Balestier
found Kipling laying out a flower garden on this hayfield. His blood
boiled. He
hit the ceiling. Kipling fired right back. The air over the Green
Mountains of
Vermont turned blue!
A few days later, when Kipling was out riding his bicycle, his
brother-in-law
drove a wagon and a team of horses across the road suddenly and
forced Kipling
to take a spill. And Kipling the man who wrote: "If you can keep
your head
when all about you are losing theirs and blaming it on you" - he lost
his own
head, and swore out a warrant for Balestier's arrest I A sensational
trial followed.
Reporters from the big cities poured into the town. The news flashed
around the
world. Nothing was settled. This quarrel caused Kipling and his wife
to abandon
their American home for the rest of their lives. All that worry and
bitterness over
a mere trifle! A load of hay.
Pericles said, twenty-four centuries ago: "Come, gentlemen, we sit
too long on
trifles." We do, indeed!
Here is one of the most interesting stories that Dr. Harry Emerson
Fosdick ever
told-a story about the battles won and lost by a giant of the forest:
On the slope of Long's Peak in Colorado lies the ruin of 3 gigantic

tree.

Naturalists tell us that it stood for some four hundred years. It was a seedling

when Columbus landed at San Salvador, and half grown when the Pilgrims

settled at Plymouth. During the course of its long life it was struck by lightning

fourteen times, and the innumerable avalanches and storms of four centuries

thundered past it. It survived them all. In the end, however, an army of beetles

attacked the tree and leveled it to the ground. The insects ate their way through

the bark and gradually destroyed the inner strength of the tree by their tiny but

incessant attacks. A forest giant which age had not withered, nor lightning

blasted, nor storms subdued, fell at last before beetles so small that a man could

blasted, nor storms subdued, fell at last before beetles so small that a man could

crush them between his forefinger and his thumb.

Aren't we all like that battling giant of the forest? Don't we manage somehow to

survive the rare storms and avalanches and lightning blasts of We, only to let our

hearts be eaten out by little beetles of worry-little beetles that could be crushed

between a finger and a thumb?

A few years ago, I travelled through the Teton National Park, in Wyoming, with

Charles Seifred, highway superintendent for the state of Wyoming, and some of

his friends. We were all going to visit the John D. Rockefeller estate in the park.

But the car in which I was riding took the wrong turn, got lost, and drove up to the entrance of the estate an hour after the other cars had gone in. Mr. Seifred had the key that unlocked the private gate, so he waited in the hot, mosquitoinfested woods for an hour until we arrived. The mosquitoes were enough to drive a saint insane. But they couldn't triumph over Charles Seifred. While waiting for us, he cut a limb off an aspen tree-and made a whistle of it. When we arrived, was he cussing the mosquitoes? No, he was playing his whistle. I have kept that whistle as a memento of a man who knew how to put trifles in their place. To break the worry habit before it breaks you, here is Rule 2: Let's not allow ourselves to be upset by small things we should despise and forget. Remember "Life is too short to be little."

~~~~~

**A Law That Will Outlaw Many of Your Worries**

As a child, I grew up on a Missouri farm; and one day, while helping my mother  
pick cherries, I began to cry. My mother said: "Dale, what in the world  
are you  
crying about?" I blubbered: "I'm afraid I am going to be buried  
alive!"  
I was full of worries in those days. When thunderstorms came, I  
worried for fear  
I would be killed by lightning. When hard times came, I worried for  
fear we  
wouldn't have enough to eat. I worried for fear I would go to hell  
when I died. I  
was terrified for fear an older boy, Sam White, would cut off my big  
ears-as he  
threatened to do. I worried for fear girls would laugh at me if I  
tipped my hat to  
them. I worried for fear no girl would ever be willing to marry me. I  
worried  
about what I would say to my wife immediately after we were  
married. I  
worried about what I would say to my wife immediately after we were  
married. I  
imagined that we would be married in some country church, and  
then get in a  
surrey with fringe on the top and ride back to the farm ... but how  
would I be  
able to keep the conversation going on that ride back to the farm?  
How? How? I  
pondered over that earth-shaking problem for many an hour as I  
walked behind  
the plough.  
As the years went by, I gradually discovered that ninety-nine per

cent of the things I worried about never happened. For example, as I have already said, I was once terrified of lightning; but I now know that the chances of my being killed by lightning in any one year are, according to the National Safety Council, only one in three hundred and fifty thousand. My fear of being buried alive was even more absurd: I don't imagine that one person in ten million is buried alive; yet I once cried for fear of it. One person out of every eight dies of cancer. If I had wanted something to worry about, I should have worried about cancer -instead of being killed by lightning or being buried alive. To be sure, I have been talking about the worries of youth and adolescence. But many of our adult worries are almost as absurd. You and I could probably eliminate nine-tenths of our worries right now if we would cease our fretting long enough to discover whether, by the law of averages, there was any real justification for our worries. The most famous insurance company on earth-Lloyd's of London-has made countless millions out of the tendency of everybody to worry about things that rarely happen. Lloyd's of London bets people that the disasters they are worrying about will never occur. However, they don't call it betting. They call it insurance. But it is really betting based on the law of averages. This great

insurance firm  
has been going strong for two hundred years; and unless human  
nature changes,  
it will still be going strong fifty centuries from now by insuring  
shoes and ships  
and sealing-wax against disasters that, by the law of average, don't  
happen nearly  
so often as people imagine.  
If we examine the law of averages, we will often be astounded at the  
facts we  
uncover. For example, if I knew that during the next five years I  
would have to  
fight in a battle as bloody as the Battle of Gettysburg, I would be  
terrified. I  
fight in a battle as bloody as the Battle of Gettysburg, I would be  
terrified. I  
would take out all the life insurance I could get. I would draw up my  
will and set  
all my earthly affairs in order. I would say: "I'll probably never live  
through that  
battle, so I had better make the most of the few years I have left."  
Yet the facts  
are that, according to the law of averages, it is just as dangerous, just  
as fatal, to  
try to live from age fifty to age fifty-five in peace-time as it was to  
fight in the  
Battle of Gettysburg. What I am trying to say is this: in times of  
peace, just as  
many people die per thousand between the ages of fifty and fifty-five  
as were  
killed per thousand among the 163,000 soldiers who fought at  
Gettysburg.  
I wrote several chapters of this book at James Simpson's Num-Ti-  
Gah Lodge, on  
the shore of Bow Lake in the Canadian Rockies. While stopping

there one  
summer, I met Mr. and Mrs. Herbert H. Salinger, of 2298 Pacific  
Avenue, San  
Francisco. Mrs. Salinger, a poised, serene woman, gave me the  
impression that  
she had never worried. One evening in front of the roaring fireplace,  
I asked her  
if she had ever been troubled by worry. "Troubled by it?" she said.  
"My life was  
almost ruined by it. Before I learned to conquer worry, I lived  
through eleven  
years of self-made hell. I was irritable and hot-tempered. I lived  
under terrific  
tension. I would take the bus every week from my home in San  
Mateo to shop in  
San Francisco. But even while shopping, I worried myself into a  
dither: maybe I  
had left the electric iron connected on the ironing board. Maybe the  
house had  
caught fire. Maybe the maid had run off and left the children. Maybe  
they had  
been out on their bicycles and been killed by a car. In the midst of  
my shopping,  
I would often worry myself into a cold perspiration and rush out and  
take the bus  
home to see if everything was all right. No wonder my first marriage  
ended in  
disaster.  
"My second husband is a lawyer-a quiet, analytical man who never  
worries  
about anything. When I became tense and anxious, he would say to  
me: 'Relax.  
Let's think this out. ... What are you really worrying about? Let's  
examine the  
law of averages and see whether or not it is likely to happen.'

"For example, I remember the time we were driving from Albuquerque, New Mexico, to the Carlsbad Caverns-driving on a dirt road-when we were caught in a terrible rainstorm.

"The car was slithering and sliding. We couldn't control it. I was positive we would slide off into one of the ditches that flanked the road; but my husband kept repeating to me: 'I am driving very slowly. Nothing serious is likely to happen. Even if the car does slide into the ditch, by the law of averages, we won't be hurt.' His calmness and confidence quieted me. won't be hurt.' His calmness and confidence quieted me.

"One summer we were on a camping trip in the Touquin Valley of the Canadian Rockies. One night we were camping seven thousand feet above sea level, when a storm threatened to tear our tents to shreds. The tents were tied with guy ropes to a wooden platform. The outer tent shook and trembled and screamed and shrieked in the wind. I expected every minute to see our tent torn loose and hurled through the sky. I was terrified! But my husband kept saying: 'Look, my dear, we are travelling with Brewster's guides. Brewster's know what they are doing. They have been pitching tents in these mountains for sixty years. This tent has been here for many seasons. It hasn't blown down yet and, by the law of averages, it won't blow away tonight; and even if it does, we can take shelter in

another tent. So relax. ... I did; and I slept soundly the balance of the night.

"A few years ago an infantile-paralysis epidemic swept over our part of

California. In the old days, I would have been hysterical. But my husband

persuaded me to act calmly. We took all the precautions we could; we kept our

children away from crowds, away from school and the movies. By consulting the

Board of Health, we found out that even during the worst infantile-paralysis

epidemic that California had ever known up to that time, only 1,835 children had

been stricken in the entire state of California. And that the usual number was

around two hundred or three hundred. Tragic as those figures are, we nevertheless felt that, according to the law of averages, the chances of any one

child being stricken were remote.

" 'By the law of averages, it won't happen.' That phrase has destroyed ninety per

cent of my worries; and it has made the past twenty years of my life beautiful

and peaceful beyond my highest expectations."

General George Crook-probably the greatest Indian fighter in American history says in his Autobiography that "nearly all the worries and unhappiness" of the

Indians "came from their imagination, and not from reality."

As I look back across the decades, I can see that that is where most of my

worries came from also. Jim Grant told me that that had been his experience,

too. He owns the James A. Grant Distributing Company, 204 Franklin Street,

New York City. He orders from ten to fifteen car-loads of Florida oranges and grapefruit at a time. He told me that he used to torture himself with such thoughts as: What if there's a train wreck? What if my fruit is strewn all over the countryside? What if a bridge collapses as my cars are going across it? Of course, the fruit was insured; but he feared that if he didn't deliver his fruit on time, he might risk the loss of his market. He worried so much that he feared he had stomach ulcers and went to a doctor. The doctor told him there was nothing wrong with him except jumpy nerves. "I saw the light then," he said, "and began to ask myself questions. I said to myself: 'Look here, Jim Grant, how many fruit cars have you handled over the years?' The answer was: 'About twenty-five thousand.' Then I asked myself: 'How many of those cars were ever wrecked?' The answer was: 'Oh-maybe five.' Then I said to myself: 'Only five-out of twenty-five thousand? Do you know what that means? A ratio of five thousand to one! In other words, by the law of averages, based on experience, the chances are five thousand to one against one of your cars ever being wrecked. So what are you worried about?' "Then I said to myself: 'Well, a bridge may collapse!' Then I asked myself: 'How

many cars have you actually lost from a bridge collapsing?' The answer was-  
'None.' Then I said to myself: 'Aren't you a fool to be worrying yourself into stomach ulcers over a bridge which has never yet collapsed, and over a railroad wreck when the chances are five thousand to one against it!'  
"When I looked at it that way," Jim Grant told me, "I felt pretty silly. I decided then and there to let the law of averages do the worrying for me-and I have not been troubled with my 'stomach ulcer' since!"  
When Al Smith was Governor of New York, I heard him answer the attacks of his political enemies by saying over and over: "Let's examine the record ... let's examine the record." Then he proceeded to give the facts. The next time you and I are worrying about what may happen, let's take a tip from wise old Al Smith: let's examine the record and see what basis there is, if any, for our gnawing anxieties. That is precisely what Frederick J. Mahlstedt did when he feared he was lying in his grave. Here is his story as he told it to one of our adult education classes in New York:  
"Early in June, 1944, I was lying in a slit trench near Omaha Beach. I was with the 999th Signal Service Company, and we had just 'dug in' in Normandy. As I looked around at that slit trench-just a rectangular hole in the ground-I said to myself: 'This looks just like a grave.' When I lay down and tried to sleep in it, it felt like a grave. I couldn't help saying to myself: 'Maybe this is my

grave.' When  
the German bombers began coming over at 11 p.m., and the bombs  
started  
falling, I was scared stiff. For the first two or three nights I couldn't  
sleep at all.  
By the fourth or fifth night, I was almost a nervous wreck. I knew  
that if I didn't  
do something, I would go stark crazy. So I reminded myself that five  
nights had  
do something, I would go stark crazy. So I reminded myself that five  
nights had  
passed, and I was still alive; and so was every man in our outfit.  
Only two had  
been injured, and they had been hurt, not by German bombs, but by  
falling flak,  
from our own anti-aircraft guns. I decided to stop worrying by doing  
something  
constructive. So I built a thick wooden roof over my slit trench, to  
protect myself  
from flak. I thought of the vast area over which my unit was spread.  
I told  
myself that the only way I could be killed in that deep, narrow slit  
trench was by  
a direct hit; and I figured out that the chance of a direct hit on me  
was not one in  
ten thousand. After a couple of nights of looking at it in this way, I  
calmed down  
and slept even through the bomb raids!"  
The United States Navy used the statistics of the law of averages to  
buck up the  
morale of their men. One ex-sailor told me that when he and his  
shipmates were  
assigned to high-octane tankers, they were worried stiff. They all  
believed that if  
a tanker loaded with high-octane gasoline was hit by a torpedo, it

exploded and  
blew everybody to kingdom come.  
But the U.S. Navy knew otherwise; so the Navy issued exact figures,  
showing  
that out of one hundred tankers hit by torpedoes sixty stayed afloat;  
and of the  
forty that did sink, only five sank in less than ten minutes. That  
meant time to get  
off the ship-it also meant casualties were exceedingly small. Did this  
help  
morale? "This knowledge of the law of averages wiped out my  
jitters," said  
Clyde W. Maas, of 1969 Walnut Street, St. Paul, Minnesota-the man  
who told  
this story. "The whole crew felt better. We knew we had a chance;  
and that, by  
the law of averages, we probably wouldn't be killed." To break the  
worry habit  
before it breaks you-here is Rule 3:  
"Let's examine the record." Let's ask ourselves: "What are the  
chances,  
according to the law of averages, that this event I am worrying about  
will ever  
occur?"

**Co-Operate With The Inevitable**

When I was a little boy, I was playing with some of my friends in the attic of an old, abandoned log house in north-west Missouri. As I climbed down out of the attic, I rested my feet on a window-sill for a moment-and then jumped. I had a ring on my left forefinger; and as I jumped, the ring caught on a nailhead and tore off my finger.  
I screamed. I was terrified. I was positive I was going to die. But after the hand healed, I never worried about it for one split second. What would have been the use? ... I accepted the inevitable.

Now I often go for a month at a time without even thinking about the fact that I have only three fingers and a thumb on my left hand.

A few years ago, I met a man who was running a freight elevator in one of the downtown office buildings in New York. I noticed that his left hand had been cut off at the wrist. I asked him if the loss of that hand bothered him. He said:

"Oh, no, I hardly ever think about it. I am not married; and the only time I ever think about it is when I try to thread a needle."

It is astonishing how quickly we can accept almost any situation-if we have to and adjust ourselves to it and forget about it.

I often think of an inscription on the ruins of a fifteenth-century cathedral in Amsterdam, Holland. This inscription says in Flemish: "It is so. It

cannot be  
otherwise."

As you and I march across the decades of time, we are going to meet a lot of unpleasant situations that are so. They cannot be otherwise. We have our choice.

We can either accept them as inevitable and adjust ourselves to them, or we can ruin our lives with rebellion and maybe end up with a nervous breakdown.

Here is a bit of sage advice from one of my favourite philosophers, William

James. "Be willing to have it so," he said. "Acceptance of what has happened is the first step to overcoming the consequence of any misfortune."

Elizabeth

Connley, of 2840 NE 49th Avenue, Portland, Oregon, had to find that out the

hard way. Here is a letter that she wrote me recently: "On the very day that

America was celebrating the victory of our armed forces in North Africa," the

letter says, "I received a telegram from the War Department: my nephew- the

person I loved most-was missing in action. A short time later, another telegram

arrived saying he was dead.

"I was prostrate with grief. Up to that time, I had felt that life had been very

good to me. I had a job I loved. I had helped to raise this nephew. He represented

to me all that was fine and good in young manhood. I had felt that all the bread I

had cast upon the waters was coming back to me as cake! ... Then came this

telegram. My whole world collapsed. I felt there was nothing left to live for. I

telegram. My whole world collapsed. I felt there was nothing left to live for. I

neglected my work; neglected my friends. I let everything go. I was bitter and

resentful. Why did my loving nephew have to be taken? Why did this good boy with life all before him-why did he have to be killed? I couldn't accept it. My

grief was so overwhelming that I decided to give up my work, and go away and

hide myself in my tears and bitterness.

"I was clearing out my desk, getting ready to quit, when I came across a letter

that I had forgotten-a letter from this nephew who had been killed, a letter he had

written to me when my mother had died a few years ago. 'Of course, we will

miss her,' the letter said, 'and especially you. But I know you'll carry on. Your

own personal philosophy will make you do that. I shall never forget the beautiful

truths you taught me. Wherever I am, or how far apart we may be, I shall always

remember that you taught me to smile, and to take whatever comes, like a man.'

"I read and reread that letter. It seemed as if he were there beside me, speaking to

me. He seemed to be saying to me: 'Why don't you do what you taught me to do?

Carry on, no matter what happens. Hide your private sorrows under a smile and

carry on.'

"So, I went back to my work. I stopped being bitter and rebellious. I kept saying

to myself: 'It is done. I can't change it. But I can and will carry on as he wished me to do.' I threw all my mind and strength into my work. I wrote letters to soldiers-to other people's boys. I joined an adult-education class at night-seeking out new interests and making new friends. I can hardly believe the change that has come over me. I have ceased mourning over the past that is for ever gone. I am living each day now with joy-just as my nephew would have wanted me to do. I have made peace with life. I have accepted my fate. I am now living a fuller and more complete life than I had ever known."

Elizabeth Connley, out in Portland, Oregon, learned what all of us will have to learn sooner or later: namely, that we must accept and co-operate with the inevitable. "It is so. It cannot be otherwise." That is not an easy lesson to learn.

Even kings on their thrones have to keep reminding themselves of it. The late

George V had these framed words hanging on the wall of his library in

Buckingham Palace: "Teach me neither to cry for the moon nor over spilt milk."

The same thought is expressed by Schopenhauer in this way: "A good supply of resignation is of the first importance in providing for the journey of life."

Obviously, circumstances alone do not make us happy or unhappy. It is the way

Obviously, circumstances alone do not make us happy or unhappy. It is the way

we react to circumstances that determines our feelings. Jesus said that the kingdom of heaven is within you. That is where the kingdom of hell is, too.

We can all endure disaster and tragedy and triumph over them-if we have to. We may not think we can, but we have surprisingly strong inner resources that will see us through if we will only make use of them. We are stronger than we think.

The late Booth Tarkington always said: "I could take anything that life could force upon me except one thing: blindness. I could never endure that."

Then one day, when he was along in his sixties, Tarkington glanced down at the carpet on the floor. The colours were blurred. He couldn't see the pattern. He went to a specialist. He learned the tragic truth: he was losing his sight. One eye was nearly blind; the other would follow. That which he feared most had come upon him.

And how did Tarkington react to this "worst of all disasters"? Did he feel: "This is it! This is the end of my life"? No, to his amazement, he felt quite gay. He even called upon his humour. Floating "specks" annoyed him; they would swim across his eyes and cut off his vision. Yet when the largest of these specks would swim across his sight, he would say: "Hello! There's Grandfather again! Wonder where he's going on this fine morning!"

How could fate ever conquer a spirit like that? The answer is it

couldn't. When total blindness closed in, Tarkington said: "I found I could take the loss of my eyesight, just as a man can take anything else. If I lost all five of my senses, I know I could live on inside my mind. For it is in the mind we see, and in the mind we live, whether we know it or not." In the hope of restoring his eyesight, Tarkington had to go through more than twelve operations within one year. With local anaesthetic! Did he rail against this? He knew it had to be done. He knew he couldn't escape it, so the only way to lessen his suffering was to take it with grace. He refused a private room at the hospital and went into a ward, where he could be with other people who had troubles, too. He tried to cheer them up. And when he had to submit to repeated operations-fully conscious of what was being done to his eyes-he tried to remember how fortunate he was. "How wonderful!" he said. "How wonderful, that science now has the skill to operate on anything so delicate as the human eye!" The average man would have been a nervous wreck if he had had to endure more than twelve operations and blindness. Yet Tarkington said: "I would not exchange this experience for a happier one." It taught him acceptance. It taught him that nothing life could bring him was beyond his strength to endure. It

taught him, as John Milton discovered, that "It is not miserable to be blind, it is

only miserable not to be able to endure blindness."

Margaret Fuller, the famous New England feminist, once offered as her credo: "I

accept the Universe!"

When grouchy old Thomas Carlyle heard that in England, he snorted: "By gad,

she'd better!" Yes, and by gad, you and I had better accept the inevitable, too!

If we rail and kick against it and grow bitter, we won't change the inevitable; but

we will change ourselves. I know. I have tried it.

I once refused to accept an inevitable situation with which I was confronted. I

played the fool and railed against it, and rebelled. I turned my nights into hells of

insomnia. I brought upon myself everything I didn't want. Finally, after a year of

self-torture, I had to accept what I knew from the outset I couldn't possibly alter.

I should have cried out years ago with old Walt Whitman:

Oh, to confront night, storms, hunger,

Ridicule, accident, rebuffs as the trees  
and animals do.

I spent twelve years working with cattle; yet I never saw a Jersey cow running a

temperature because the pasture was burning up from a lack of rain or because of

sleet and cold or because her boy friend was paying too much attention to

another heifer. The animals confront night, storms, and hunger calmly; so they

never have nervous breakdowns or stomach ulcers; and they never go insane.

Am I advocating that we simply bow down to all the adversities that come our way? Not by a long shot! That is mere fatalism. As long as there is a chance that we can save a situation, let's fight! But when common sense tells us that we are up against something that is so-and cannot be otherwise- then, in the name of our sanity, let's not look before and after and pine for what is not.

The late Dean Hawkes of Columbia University told me that he had taken a

Mother Goose rhyme as one of his mottoes:

For every ailment under the sun.

There is a remedy, or there is none;

If there be one, try to find it;

If there be none, never mind it.

While writing this book, I interviewed a number of the leading business men of

America; and I was impressed by the fact that they co-operated with the

inevitable and led lives singularly free from worry. If they hadn't done that, they

would have cracked under the strain. Here are a few examples of what I mean:

J.C. Penney, founder of the nation-wide chain of Penney stores, said to me: "I

wouldn't worry if I lost every cent I have because I don't see what is to be gained

by worrying. I do the best job I possibly can; and leave the results in the laps of

the gods."

Henry Ford told me much the same thing. "When I can't handle events," he said,

"I let them handle themselves."

When I asked K.T. Keller, president of the Chrysler Corporation,

how he kept  
from worrying, he said: "When I am up against a tough situation, if I  
can do  
anything about it, I do it. If I can't, I just forget it. I never worry  
about the future,  
because I know no man living can possibly figure out what is going  
to happen in  
the future. There are so many forces that will affect that future!  
Nobody can tell  
what prompts those forces-or understand them. So why worry about  
them?" K.  
T. Keller would be embarrassed if you told him he is a philosopher.  
He is just a  
good business man, yet he has stumbled on the same philosophy that  
Epictetus  
taught in Rome nineteen centuries ago. "There is only one way to  
happiness,"  
Epictetus taught the Romans, "and that is to cease worrying about  
things which  
are beyond the power of our will."  
Sarah Bernhardt, the "divine Sarah" was an illustrious example of a  
woman who  
knew how to co-operate with the inevitable. For half a century, she  
had been the  
reigning queen of the theatre on four continents-the best-loved  
actress on earth.  
Then when she was seventy-one and broke-she had lost all her  
money-her  
physician, Professor Pozzi of Paris, told her he would have to  
amputate her leg.  
physician, Professor Pozzi of Paris, told her he would have to  
amputate her leg.  
While crossing the Atlantic, she had fallen on deck during a storm,  
and injured  
her leg severely. Phlebitis developed. Her leg shrank. The pain

became so  
intense that the doctor felt her leg had to be amputated. He was  
almost afraid to  
tell the stormy, tempestuous "divine Sarah" what had to be done. He  
fully  
expected that the terrible news would set off an explosion of  
hysteria. But he  
was wrong. Sarah looked at him a moment, and then said quietly: "If  
it has to be,  
it has to be." It was fate.

As she was being wheeled away to the operating room, her son stood  
weeping.

She waved to him with a gay gesture and said cheerfully: "Don't go  
away. I'll be  
right back."

On the way to the operating room she recited a scene from one of  
her plays.

Someone asked her if she were doing this to cheer herself up. She  
said: "No, to

cheer up the doctors and nurses. It will be a strain on them."

After recovering from the operation, Sarah Bernhardt went on  
touring the world

and enchanting audiences for another seven years.

"When we stop fighting the inevitable," said Elsie Mac-Cormick in a  
Reader's

Digest article, "we release energy which enables us to create a richer  
life."

No one living has enough emotion and vigour to fight the inevitable  
and, at the

same time, enough left over to create a new life. Choose one or the  
other. You

can either bend with the inevitable sleet-storms of life-or you can  
resist them and

break!

I saw that happen on a farm I own in Missouri. I planted a score of

trees on that  
farm. At first, they grew with astonishing rapidity. Then a sleet-  
storm encrusted  
each twig and branch with a heavy coating of ice. Instead of bowing  
gracefully  
to their burden, these trees proudly resisted and broke and split under  
the load and had to be destroyed. They hadn't learned the wisdom of  
the forests of the  
north. I have travelled hundreds of miles through the evergreen  
forests of  
Canada, yet I have never seen a spruce or a pine broken by sleet or  
ice. These  
evergreen forests know how to bend, how to bow down their  
branches, how to  
co-operate with the inevitable.  
The masters of jujitsu teach their pupils to "bend like the willow;  
don't resist like  
the oak."  
Why do you think your automobile tyres stand up on the road and  
take so much  
punishment? At first, the manufacturers tried to make a tyre that  
would resist the  
shocks of the road. It was soon cut to ribbons. Then they made a tyre  
that would  
absorb the shocks of the road. That tyre could "take it". You and I  
will last  
longer, and enjoy smoother riding, if we learn to absorb the shocks  
and jolts  
along the rocky road of life.  
What will happen to you and me if we resist the shocks of life  
instead of  
absorbing them? What will happen if we refuse to "bend like the  
willow" and  
insist on resisting like the oak? The answer is easy. We will set up a  
series of

inner conflicts. We will be worried, tense, strained, and neurotic.  
If we go still further and reject the harsh world of reality and retreat  
into a dream  
world of our own making, we will then be insane.  
During the war, millions of frightened soldiers had either to accept  
the inevitable  
or break under the strain. To illustrate, let's take the case of William  
H.  
Casseliuss, 7126 76th Street, Glendale, New York. Here is a prize-  
winning talk  
he gave before one of my adult-education classes in New York:  
"Shortly after I joined the Coast Guard, I was assigned to one of the  
hottest spots  
on this side of the Atlantic. I was made a supervisor of explosives.  
Imagine it.  
Me! A biscuit salesman becoming a supervisor of explosives! The  
very thought  
of finding yourself standing on top of thousands of tons of T.N.T. is  
enough to  
chill the marrow in a cracker salesman's bones. I was given only two  
days of  
instruction; and what I learned filled me with even more terror. I'll  
never forget  
my first assignment. On a dark, cold, foggy day, I was given my  
orders on the  
open pier of Caven Point, Bayonne, New Jersey.  
"I was assigned to Hold No. 5 on my ship. I had to work down in  
that hold with  
five longshoremen. They had strong backs, but they knew nothing  
whatever  
about explosives. And they were loading blockbusters, each one of  
which  
contained a ton of T.N.T.-enough explosive to blow that old ship to  
kingdom  
come. These blockbusters were being lowered by two cables. I kept

saying to  
myself: Suppose one of those cables slipped-or broke! Oh, boy! Was  
I scared! I  
trembled. My mouth was dry. My knees sagged. My heart pounded.  
But I  
couldn't run away. That would be desertion. I would be disgraced-  
my parents  
would be disgraced-and I might be shot for desertion. I couldn't run.  
I had to  
stay. I kept looking at the careless way those longshoremen were  
handling those  
blockbusters. The ship might blow up any minute. After an hour or  
more of this  
blockbusters. The ship might blow up any minute. After an hour or  
more of this  
spine-chilling terror, I began to use a little common sense. I gave  
myself a good  
talking to. I said: 'Look here! So you are blown up. So what! You  
will never  
know the difference! It will be an easy way to die. Much better than  
dying by  
cancer. Don't be a fool. You can't expect to live for ever! You've got  
to do this  
job-or be shot. So you might as well like it."  
"I talked to myself like that for hours; and I began to feel at ease.  
Finally, I  
overcame my worry and fears by forcing myself to accept an  
inevitable situation.  
"I'll never forget that lesson. Every time I am tempted now to worry  
about  
something I can't possibly change, I shrug my shoulders and say:  
'Forget it.' I  
find that it works-even for a biscuit salesman." Hooray! Let's give  
three cheers  
and one cheer more for the biscuit salesman of the Pinafore.

Outside the crucifixion of Jesus, the most famous death scene in all history was the death of Socrates. Ten thousand centuries from now, men will still be reading and cherishing Plato's immortal description of it-one of the most moving and beautiful passages in all literature. Certain men of Athens-jealous and envious of old barefooted Socrates-trumped up charges against him and had him tried and condemned to death. When the friendly jailer gave Socrates the poison cup to drink, the jailer said: "Try to bear lightly what needs must be." Socrates did. He faced death with a calmness and resignation that touched the hem of divinity. "Try to bear lightly what needs must be." Those words were spoken 399 years before Christ was born; but this worrying old world needs those words today more than ever before: "Try to bear lightly what needs must be." During the past eight years, I have been reading practically every book and magazine article I could find that dealt even remotely with banishing worry. ... Would you like to know what is the best single bit of advice about worry that I have ever discovered in all that reading? Well, here it is-summed up in twentyseven words-words that you and I ought to paste on our bathroom mirrors, so that each time we wash our faces we could also wash away all worry from our minds. This priceless prayer was written by Dr. Reinhold Niebuhr, Professor of

Applied Christianity, Union Theological Seminary, Broadway and  
120th Street,  
New York.

God grant me the serenity To accept the things I cannot change; The  
courage to  
change the things I can; And the wisdom to know the difference.  
change the things I can; And the wisdom to know the difference.  
To break the worry habit before it breaks you, Rule 4 is:  
Co-operate with the inevitable.

~~~~~

Put A " Stop-Loss" Order On Your Worries

WOULD you like to know how to make money on the Stock Exchange? Well, so would a million other people-and if I knew the answer, this book would sell for a fabulous price. However, there's one good idea that some successful operators use. This story was told to me by Charles Roberts, an investment counselor with offices at 17 East 42nd Street, New York. "I originally came up to New York from Texas with twenty thousand dollars which my friends had given me to invest in the stock market," Charles Roberts told me. "I thought," he continued, "that I knew the ropes in the stock market; but I lost every cent. True, I made a lot of profit on some deals; but I ended up by losing everything. "I did not mind so much losing my own money," Mr. Roberts explained, "but I felt terrible about having lost my friends' money, even though they could well afford it. I dreaded facing them again after our venture had turned out so unfortunately, but, to my astonishment, they not only were good sports about it, but proved to be incurable optimists. "I knew I had been trading on a hit-or-miss basis and depending largely on luck and other people's opinions. As H. I. Phillips said, I had been 'playing the stock market by ear'.

"I began to think over my mistakes and I determined that before I went back into the market again, I would try to find out what it was all about. So I sought out and became acquainted with one of the most successful speculators who ever lived: Burton S. Castles. I believed I could learn a great deal from him because he had long enjoyed the reputation of being successful year after year and I knew that such a career was not the result of mere chance or luck.

"He asked me a few questions about how I had traded before and then told me what I believe is the most important principle in trading. He said: 'I put a stoploss order on every market commitment I make. If I buy a stock at, say, fifty loss order on every market commitment I make. If I buy a stock at, say, fifty dollars a share, I immediately place a stop-loss order on it at forty-five.' That means that when and if the stock should decline as much as five points below its cost, it would be sold automatically, thereby, limiting the loss to five points.

" 'If your commitments are intelligently made in the first place,' the old master continued, 'your profits will average ten, twenty-five, or even fifty points. Consequently, by limiting your losses to five points, you can be wrong more than half of the time and still make plenty of money?'

"I adopted that principle immediately and have used it ever since. It has saved my clients and me many thousands of dollars.

"After a while I realised that the stop-loss principle could be used in

other ways
besides in the stock market. I began to place a stop-loss order on any
and every
kind of annoyance and resentment that came to me. It has worked
like magic.
"For example, I often have a luncheon date with a friend who is
rarely on time.
In the old days, he used to keep me stewing around for half my
lunch hour
before he showed up. Finally, I told him about my stop-loss orders
on my
worries. I said: 'Bill, my stop-loss order on waiting for you is exactly
ten
minutes. If you arrive more than ten minutes late, our luncheon
engagement will
be sold down the river-and I'll be gone.' "
Man alive! How I wish I had had the sense, years ago, to put stop-
loss orders on
my impatience, on my temper, on my desire for self-justification, on
my regrets,
and on all my mental and emotional strains. Why didn't I have the
horse sense to
size up each situation that threatened to destroy my peace of mind
and say to
myself: "See here, Dale Carnegie, this situation is worth just so
much fussing
about and no more"? ... Why didn't I?
However, I must give myself credit for a little sense on one
occasion, at least.
And it was a serious occasion, too-a crisis in my life-a crisis when I
stood
watching my dreams and my plans for the future and the work of
years vanish
into thin air. It happened like this. In my early thirties, I had decided
to spend my

life writing novels. I was going to be a second Frank Norris or Jack London or Thomas Hardy. I was so in earnest that I spent two years in Europe - where I would live cheaply with dollars during the period of wild, printing-press money that followed the First World War. I spent two years there, writing my magnum opus. I called it *The Blizzard*. The title was a natural, for the reception it got among publishers was as cold as any blizzard that ever howled across the plains of the Dakotas. When my literary agent told me it was worthless, that I had no gift, no talent, for fiction, my heart almost stopped. I left his office in a daze. I couldn't have been more stunned if he had hit me across the head with a club. I was stupefied. I realised that I was standing at the crossroads of life, and had to make a tremendous decision. What should I do? Which way should I turn? Weeks passed before I came out of the daze. At that time, I had never heard of the phrase "put a stop-loss order on your worries". But as I look back now, I can see that I did just that. I wrote off my two years of sweating over that novel for just what they were worth - a noble experiment - and went forward from there. I returned to my work of organising and teaching adult-education classes, and wrote biographies in my spare time - biographies and non-fiction books such as the one you are reading now.

Am I glad now that I made that decision? Glad? Every time I think about it now
I feel like dancing in the street for sheer joy! I can honestly say that I have never
spent a day or an hour since, lamenting the fact that I am not another Thomas
Hardy.
One night a century ago, when a screech owl was screeching in the woods along
the shore of Walden Pond, Henry Thoreau dipped his goose quill into his
homemade ink and wrote in his diary: "The cost of a thing is the amount of what
I call life, which is required to be exchanged for it immediately or in the long
run."
To put it another way: we are fools when we overpay for a thing in terms of
what it takes out of our very existence.
Yet that is precisely what Gilbert and Sullivan did. They knew how to create gay
words and gay music, but they knew distressingly little about how to create
gaiety in their own lives. They created some of the loveliest light operas that
ever delighted the world: *Patience*, *Pinafore*, *The Mikado*. But they couldn't
control their tempers. They embittered their years over nothing more than the
price of a carpet! Sullivan ordered a new carpet for the theatre they had bought.
When Gilbert saw the bill, he hit the roof. They battled it out in court, and never
spoke to one another again as long as they lived. When Sullivan wrote the music

for a new production, he mailed it to Gilbert; and when Gilbert wrote the words,
he mailed it back to Sullivan. Once they had to take a curtain call together, but
they stood on opposite sides of the stage and bowed in different directions, so
they wouldn't see one another. They hadn't the sense to put a stop-loss order on
they wouldn't see one another. They hadn't the sense to put a stop-loss order on
their resentments, as Lincoln did.
Once, during the Civil War, when some of Lincoln's friends were denouncing his
bitter enemies, Lincoln said: "You have more of a feeling of personal resentment
than I have. Perhaps I have too little of it; but I never thought it paid.
A man
doesn't have the time to spend half his life in quarrels. If any man ceases to
attack me, I never remember the past against him."
I wish an old aunt of mine-Aunt Edith-had had Lincoln's forgiving spirit. She
and Uncle Frank lived on a mortgaged farm that was infested with cockleburs
and cursed with poor soil and ditches. They had tough going-had to squeeze
every nickel. But Aunt Edith loved to buy a few curtains and other items to
brighten up their bare home. She bought these small luxuries on credit at Dan
Eversole's drygoods store in Maryville, Missouri. Uncle Frank worried about
their debts. He had a farmer's horror of running up bills, so he secretly told Dan
Eversole to stop letting his wife buy on credit. When she heard that,

she hit the
roof-and she was still hitting the roof about it almost fifty years after
it had
happened. I have heard her tell the story-not once, but many times.
The last time
I ever saw her, she was in her late seventies. I said to her; "Aunt
Edith, Uncle
Frank did wrong to humiliate you; but don't you honestly feel that
your
complaining about it almost half a century after it happened is
infinitely worse
than what he did?" (I might as well have said it to the moon.)
Aunt Edith paid dearly for the grudge and bitter memories that she
nourished.
She paid for them with her own peace of mind.
When Benjamin Franklin was seven years old, he made a mistake
that he
remembered for seventy years. When he was a lad of seven, he fell
in love with a
whistle. He was so excited about it that he went into the toyshop,
piled all his
coppers on the counter, and demanded the whistle without even
asking its price.
"I then came home," he wrote to a friend seventy years later, "and
went whistling
all over the house, much pleased with my whistle." But when his
older brothers
and sisters found out that he had paid far more for his whistle than
he should
have paid, they gave him the horse laugh; and, as he said: "I cried
with
vexation."
Years later, when Franklin was a world-famous figure, and
Ambassador to
France, he still remembered that the fact that he had paid too much

for his
whistle had caused him "more chagrin than the whistle gave him
pleasure."
But the lesson it taught Franklin was cheap in the end. "As I grew
up," he said,
"and came into the world and observed the actions of men, I thought
I met with
many, very many, who gave too much for the whistle. In short, I
conceive that a
great part of the miseries of mankind are brought upon them by the
false
estimates they have made of the value of things, and by their giving
too much for
their whistles.
Gilbert and Sullivan paid too much for their whistle. So did Aunt
Edith. So did
Dale Carnegie-on many occasions. And so did the immortal Leo
Tolstoy, author
of two of the world's greatest novels, War and Peace and Anna
Karenina.
According to The Encyclopedia Britannica, Leo Tolstoy was, during
the last
twenty years of his life, "probably the most venerated man in the
whole world."
For twenty years before he died-from 1890 to 1910-an unending
stream of
admirers made pilgrimages to his home in order to catch a glimpse
of his face, to
hear the sound of his voice, or even touch the hem of his garment.
Every
sentence he uttered was taken down in a notebook, almost as if it
were a "divine
revelation". But when it came to living-to ordinary living-well,
Tolstoy had even
less sense at seventy than Franklin had at seven! He had no sense at

all.

Here's what I mean. Tolstoy married a girl he loved very dearly. In fact, they

were so happy together that they used to get on their knees and pray to God to let

them continue their lives in such sheer, heavenly ecstasy. But the girl Tolstoy

married was jealous by nature. She used to dress herself up as a peasant and spy

on his movements, even out in the woods. They had fearful rows.

She became so

jealous, even of her own children, that she grabbed a gun and shot a hole in her

daughter's photograph. She even rolled on the floor with an opium bottle held to

her lips, and threatened to commit suicide, while the children huddled in a corner

of the room and screamed with terror.

And what did Tolstoy do? Well, I don't blame the man for up and smashing the

furniture-he had good provocation. But he did far worse than that.

He kept a

private diary! Yes, a diary, in which he placed all the blame on his wife! That

was his "whistle"! He was determined to make sure that coming generations

would exonerate him and put the blame on his wife. And what did his wife do, in

answer to this? Why, she tore pages out of his diary and burned them, of course.

She started a diary of her own, in which she made him the villain.

She even

wrote a novel, entitled *Whose Fault?* in which she depicted her husband as a

household fiend and herself as a martyr.

All to what end? Why did these two people turn the only home they had into
All to what end? Why did these two people turn the only home they had into
what Tolstoy himself called "a lunatic asylum"? Obviously, there were several
reasons. One of those reasons was their burning desire to impress you and me.
Yes, we are the posterity whose opinion they were worried about!
Do we give a
hoot in Hades about which one was to blame? No, we are too concerned with our
own problems to waste a minute thinking about the Tolstoy's. What a price these
two wretched people paid for their whistle! Fifty years of living in a veritable
hell-just because neither of them had the sense to say: "Stop!"
Because neither of
them had enough judgment of values to say: "Let's put a stop-loss order on this
thing instantly. We are squandering our lives. Let's say 'Enough' now!"
Yes, I honestly believe that this is one of the greatest secrets to true peace of
mind-a decent sense of values. And I believe we could annihilate fifty per cent
of all our worries at once if we would develop a sort of private gold standard-a
gold standard of what things are worth to us in terms of our lives.
So, to break the worry habit before it breaks you, here is Rule 5:
Whenever we are tempted to throw good money after bad in terms of human
living, let's stop and ask ourselves these three Questions:
1. How much does this thing I am worrying about really matter to me?

2. At what point shall I set a "stop-loss" order on this worry -and forget it?

3. Exactly how much shall I pay for this whistle? Have I already paid more than it is worth?

~~~~~

**Don't Try To Saw Sawdust**

As I write this sentence, I can look out of my window and see some dinosaur tracks in my garden-dinosaur tracks embedded in shale and stone. I purchased those dinosaur tracks from the Peabody Museum of Yale University; and I have a letter from the curator of the Peabody Museum, saying that those tracks were made 180 million years ago. Even a Mongolian idiot wouldn't dream of trying to go back 180 million years to change those tracks. Yet that would not be any more foolish than worrying because we can't go back and change what happened 180 seconds ago-and a lot of us are doing just that To be sure, we may do something to modify the effects of what happened 180 seconds ago; but we can't something to modify the effects of what happened 180 seconds ago; but we can't possibly change the event that occurred then. There is only one way on God's green footstool that the past can be constructive; and that is by calmly analysing our past mistakes and profiting by them-and forgetting them. I know that is true; but have I always had the courage and sense to do it? To answer that question, let me tell you about a fantastic experience I had years ago. I let more than three hundred thousand dollars slip through my fingers without

making a penny's profit. It happened like this: I launched a large-scale enterprise in adult education, opened branches in various cities, and spent money lavishly in overhead and advertising. I was so busy with teaching that I had neither the time nor the desire to look after finances. I was too naive to realise that I needed an astute business manager to watch expenses. Finally, after about a year, I discovered a sobering and shocking truth. I discovered that in spite of our enormous intake, we had not netted any profit whatever. After discovering that, I should have done two things. First, I should have had the sense to do what George Washington Carver, the Negro scientist, did when he lost forty thousand dollars in a bank crash-the savings of a lifetime. When someone asked him if he knew he was bankrupt, he replied: "Yes, I heard"-and went on with his teaching. He wiped the loss out of his mind so completely that he never mentioned it again. Here is the second thing I should have done: I should have analysed my mistakes and learned a lasting lesson. But frankly, I didn't do either one of these things. Instead, I went into a tailspin of worry. For months I was in a daze. I lost sleep and I lost weight. Instead of learning a lesson from this enormous mistake, I went right ahead and did the same thing again on a smaller scale! It is embarrassing for me to admit all this stupidity; but I discovered

long ago  
that "it is easier to teach twenty what were good to be done than to  
be one of  
twenty to follow mine own teaching."  
How I wish that I had had the privilege of attending the George  
Washington  
High School here in New York and studying under Mr. Brandwine-  
the same  
teacher who taught Allen Saunders, of 939 Woodycrest Avenue,  
Bronx, New  
York!  
Mr. Saunders told me that the teacher of his hygiene class, Mr.  
Brandwine,  
taught him one of the most valuable lessons he had ever learned. "I  
was only in  
my teens," said Allen Saunders as he told me the story, "but I was a  
worrier even  
then. I used to stew and fret about the mistakes I had made. If I  
turned in an  
examination paper, I used to lie awake and chew my fingernails for  
fear I hadn't  
passed. I was always living over the things I had done, and wishing  
I'd done  
them differently; thinking over the things I had said, and wishing I'd  
said them  
better.  
"Then one morning, our class filed into the science laboratory, and  
there was the  
teacher, Mr. Brandwine, with a bottle of milk prominently displayed  
on the edge  
of the desk. We all sat down, staring at the milk, and wondering  
what it had to  
do with the hygiene course he was teaching. Then, all of a sudden,  
Mr.  
Brandwine stood up, swept the bottle of milk with a crash into the

sink-and  
shouted: 'Don't cry over spilt milk!'  
"He then made us all come to the sink and look at the wreckage.  
'Take a good  
look,' he told us, 'because I want you to remember this lesson the rest  
of your  
lives. That milk is gone you can see it's down the drain; and all the  
fussing and  
hair-pulling in the world won't bring back a drop of it. With a little  
thought and  
prevention, that milk might have been saved. But it's too late now-all  
we can do  
is write it off, forget it, and go on to the next thing.'  
"That one little demonstration," Allen Saunders told me, "stuck with  
me long  
after I'd forgotten my solid geometry and Latin. In fact, it taught me  
more about  
practical living than anything else in my four years of high school. It  
taught me  
to keep from spilling milk if I could; but to forget it completely,  
once it was  
spilled and had gone down the drain."  
Some readers are going to snort at the idea of making so much over  
a hackneyed  
proverb like "Don't cry over spilt milk." I know it is trite,  
commonplace, and a  
platitude. I know you have heard it a thousand times. But I also  
know that these  
hackneyed proverbs contain the very essence of the distilled wisdom  
of all ages.  
They have come out of the fiery experience of the human race and  
have been  
handed down through countless generations. If you were to read  
everything that  
has ever been written about worry by the great scholars of all time,

you would  
never read anything more basic or more profound than such  
hackneyed proverbs  
as "Don't cross your bridges until you come to them" and "Don't cry  
over spilt  
milk." If we only applied those two proverbs-instead of snorting at  
them-we  
milk." If we only applied those two proverbs-instead of snorting at  
them-we  
wouldn't need this book at all. In fact, if we applied most of the old  
proverbs, we  
would lead almost perfect lives. However, knowledge isn't power  
until it is  
applied; and the purpose of this book is not to tell you something  
new. The  
purpose of this book is to remind you of what you already know and  
to kick you  
in the shins and inspire you to do something about applying it.  
I have always admired a man like the late Fred Fuller Shedd, who  
had a gift for  
stating an old truth in a new and picturesque way. He was editor of  
the  
Philadelphia Bulletin; and, while addressing a college graduating  
class, he asked:  
"How many of you have ever sawed wood? Let's see your hands."  
Most of them  
had. Then he inquired: "How many of you have ever sawed  
sawdust?" No hands  
went up.  
"Of course, you can't saw sawdust!" Mr. Shedd exclaimed. "It's  
already sawed!  
And it's the same with the past. When you start worrying about  
things that are  
over and done with, you're merely trying to saw sawdust."  
When Connie Mack, the grand old man of baseball, was eighty-one

years old, I  
asked him if he had ever worried over games that were lost.  
"Oh, yes, I used to," Connie Mack told me. "But I got over that  
foolishness long  
years ago. I found out it didn't get me anywhere at all. You can't  
grind any  
grain," he said, "with water that has already gone down the creek."  
No, you can't grind any grain-and you can't saw any logs with water  
that has  
already gone down the creek. But you can saw wrinkles in your face  
and ulcers  
in your stomach.  
I had dinner with Jack Dempsey last Thanksgiving; and he told me  
over the  
turkey and cranberry sauce about the fight in which he lost the  
heavyweight  
championship to Tunney Naturally, it was a blow to his ego. "In the  
midst of that  
fight," he told me, "I suddenly realised I had become an old man. ...  
At the end  
of the tenth round, I was still on my feet, but that was about all. My  
face was  
puffed and cut, and my eyes were nearly closed. ... I saw the referee  
raise Gene  
Tunney's hand in token of victory. ... I was no longer champion of  
the world. I  
started back in the rain-back through the crowd to my dressing-  
room. As I  
passed, some people tried to grab my hand. Others had tears in their  
eyes.  
"A year later, I fought Tunney again. But it was no use. I was  
through for ever. It  
was hard to keep from worrying about it all, but I said to myself: 'I'm  
not going  
was hard to keep from worrying about it all, but I said to myself: 'I'm

not going  
to live in the past or cry over spilt milk. I am going to take this blow  
on the chin  
and not let it floor me.' "

And that is precisely what Jack Dempsey did. How? By saying to  
himself over

and over: "I won't worry about the past"? No, that would merely  
have forced him

to think of his past worries. He did it by accepting and writing off  
his defeat and

then concentrating on plans for the future. He did it by running the  
Jack

Dempsey Restaurant on Broadway and the Great Northern Hotel on  
57th Street.

He did it by promoting prize fights and giving boxing exhibitions.

He did it by

getting so busy on something constructive that he had neither the  
time nor the

temptation to worry about the past. "I have had a better time during  
the last ten

years," Jack Dempsey said, "than I had when I was champion."

As I read history and biography and observe people under trying  
circumstances,

I am constantly astonished and inspired by some people's ability to  
write off

their worries and tragedies and go on living fairly happy lives.

I once paid a visit to Sing Sing, and the thing that astonished me  
most was that

the prisoners there appeared to be about as happy as the average  
person on the

outside. I commented on it to Lewis E. Lawes-then warden of Sing  
Sing-and he

told me that when criminals first arrive at Sing Sing, they are likely  
to be

resentful and bitter. But after a few months, the majority of the more intelligent ones write off their misfortunes and settle down and accept prison life calmly and make the best of it. Warden Lawes told me about one Sing Sing prisoner- a gardener-who sang as he cultivated the vegetables and flowers inside the prison walls.

That Sing Sing prisoner who sang as he cultivated the flowers showed a lot more sense than most of us do. He knew that  
The Moving Finger writes; and, having writ,  
Moves on: nor all your Piety nor Wit  
Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line,  
Nor all your Tears wash out a Word of it.  
So why waste the tears? Of course, we have been guilty of blunders and absurdities! And so what? Who hasn't? Even Napoleon lost one-third of all the important battles he fought. Perhaps our batting average is no worse than important battles he fought. Perhaps our batting average is no worse than Napoleon's. Who knows?  
And, anyhow, all the king's horses and all the king's men can't put the past together again. So let's remember Rule 7:  
Don't try to saw sawdust.