

THE DAY WHEN EVERYTHING GOES WRONG



BY

DR. JAMES L. GORDON, D.D.

Author of

“All’s Love, Yet All’s Law”

Day When Everything Goes Wrong

A cheerful mind,
A loving heart,
Some work, and strength to do it;
A bit to eat,
A place to sleep—
That's life for me; here's to it.

—Bayard Beacon.

“The Day When Everything Goes Wrong,” is the day when your philosophy of life breaks down. Such a tragedy calls for a mental reconstruction. Nervousness is a sign of nevelness and indicates a mental disorder rather than a physical disarrangement. The problem is psychological. The disease is mental. The man has lost control of the reins of life's forces because he has lost the focus of things. Wrong thinking is the mother of wrong doing. Right thinking is the secret of right living. Right reasoning is the remedy for all ills which are human. God governs the rock by gravitation, the tree by a natural law, the animal by instinct and man by reason.

Reason is a mental process which results in a certain type of mind, therefore we read in the Great Book concerning those who are “spiritually-minded,” “carnally-minded,” “high-minded,” “sober-minded,” “feeble-minded,” “single-minded,” and “double-minded.” You can be whatever you have a mind to be. There is one person you must learn to manage—Yourself. You can train your eye to see—ask the artist. You can train your ear to hear—ask the musician. You can train your hand to construct—ask the mechanic. You can train your voice to emphasize—ask the orator. You can train your face to reveal—ask the actor. You can train your nerve to obey—ask the tight-rope walker—Ten thousand ad-

miring observers remark and affirm that he has "nerve." All men have "nerve," but this man has it in perfect control. Nerve-control is the secret of happiness. Don't let your conscience play with you, or your digestive apparatus befuddle you, or your imagination beguile you, or your own peculiar temperament deceive you—be master of yourself. Remember, there are two of you—yourself and your sub-self. Talk to yourself as a horseman talks to his horse—"Steady! Steady!" Don't use the whip on your own soul. Talk to yourself. I am going to talk to myself for forty minutes. In talking to myself I will be talking to you. In talking to you I will be talking to myself. I am not sure which needs the discourse the most, but when you inwardly and sub-consciously remark: "that fits the preacher," the chances are that the illustration is intended for **You**. So watch! Don't sleep! Listen:—

(1) **Remember, your own troubles always seem the greatest.** No tale of woe is quite as sad as yours. Destiny has reserved his choice bits of tribulation for you. The gods seem to have an evil eye on you. You were certainly born under an unlucky star. For no matter how much or how well you plan, "things go wrong," and there are days when "everything goes wrong." That is your experience—and your neighbors—and mine. So say we all. There is no trouble like ours! But trouble is not peculiar to any class, calling or profession. Where there's work, there's worry—or the tendency to worry. The captain of the aeroplane, floating through the viewless atmosphere of the skies, has discovered that there are "holes in the air." I imagined that he would be

“above” such a thing as “trouble,” but he is not. There are no exceptions, we all have our share of circumstantial misfits. William E. Gladstone, at the height of his fame, exclaims: “I am leading a dog’s life.” Dr. Charles F. Deems said that his conception of heaven was “a place where there are no more letters to write.” Said Sir James Simpson, the famous English physician: “I am weary for a real jaunt, without a sick patient lying at the end of it.” There is no work, place or position in life without its “worries,” annoyances, perplexities, anxieties and surprises. Plato said: “If we could examine the heart of a king, we would find it full of scars and black wounds.” Dr. Benjamin Rush, of Philadelphia, used to say to his medical students: “Young men, have two pockets, a small pocket and a large pocket; a small pocket for your fees and a large pocket for your annoyances.” And this was half a century before every man could own a household medical encyclopaedia and be “his own physician.”

According to the universal concensus of opinion there is only one profession without friction, concern and anxiety, and that is the preacher’s. A preacher’s work is simplicity itself. If he knows how to “draw an inference,” “draw a crowd,” and “draw his salary,” all the problems of existence are solved for him. Who would not be a preacher? And yet there are members of the ministerial profession who look pale, worried, and “much troubled about many things.” Trouble is the universal complaint. Even children have their troubles. Your child is just as much worried about his little tin horn as you are about the grand, square

or upright which adorns your drawing-room, and one is about as useful or as useless as the other. I presume your boy can get as much music out of his battered trumpet as you can extract from your superb parlor instrument. His trouble is as real as yours. One would imagine that you might see a reflection of your own temperament in the disposition of your child and laughing at his troubles, smile at your own; but no, you are only a child of a larger growth—your troubles are real, your child's imaginary, and so the world moves on.

(2) Consider how many people there are who carry great burdens and yet keep cool. There is a world of meaning in Emerson's phrase: "Energy is repose." Anybody can get excited, but the man who is sure of himself is the incarnation of composure. Wellington uttered his military behests to his subordinates in a tone which bordered on a whisper. If agitations swept his soul nobody ever knew it. The great man is the man who has become master of himself. When a candle is burning it yields light; when it is sputtering and buzzing it yields smoke. Smoke is wasted illumination. Nervousness is a sign of strength, but it is not strength. "It is a fundamental mistake to call vehemence and rigidity strength! A man is not strong who takes convulsion-fits; though six men cannot hold him." It took four men to hold Napoleon in his death convulsions. There is a strength which is weakness. Worry has killed many a great man, but it never made a man great. Repose is the mastersign of a great soul. Study repose. A man who lived to a great age was asked how he managed to do so. He replied: "I

never ran when I could have walked, never walked when I could have stood, never stood when I could have sat, never sat when I could have lain."

(3) Remember that a man's disposition means more than his occupation. "Temper," said Bishop Watson, "is nine-tenths of religion." It is nine-tenths of everything. Temper is temperament. Your temperament is your way of looking at things. The blind soldier of Liverpool wore a placard on his bosom which read:

Battles	6
Wounds	4
Children	5
Total	15

The music of the soldier's hand-organ always brought a good offering. Sydney Smith, when closing a letter to a friend, remarked: "I have gout, asthma and seven other maladies, but otherwise I am very well." The preacher who announced the hymn: "Count Your Blessings One by One," had a blind man in his congregation who muttered, musingly, "I can't do that, I should never get through." There are sightless men who can see and full-orbed mortals who are blind. Roxana, the wife of Lyman Beecher, had very little to fear when she wrote: " * * * What I fear more than all is my extreme propensity to see every thing in the most favorable point of view, to clothe every object in the brightest colors, to make all nature wear the face of hope and joy."

But we are not all blessed with such sweet and charming dispositions. Would that we were. Robertson of Brighton remarked concerning himself. "Deficiency of hope is the great fault of my character." Large cau-

tion and small hope, phrenologically, produce a pessimist. When Mark Twain heard of the death of Matthew Arnold he, smilingly, observed: "Poor Matthew, he will go to heaven and it will not please him." The American humorist was afraid that the great critic of English literature would not be entirely satisfied with the celestial embroideries of the "home over there." Some folks are never satisfied—never surprised—never pleased—never gratified—never amused—never moved. They are blinded by the light, chilled by the breeze, tormented by the heat, annoyed by the rain and bored by the world. They are never so happy as when they are absolutely miserable. When they sing, they sigh.

Dr. Samuel Johnson affirmed that the habit of looking on the bright side of life was better than "a thousand pounds a year," and Robert Louis Stevenson, whom "death had by the heels," went a step farther and said: "To be happy is the first step to being pious." God grant us that peace of heart which is described by a gifted writer as "the balance of a thousand forces in that centre of all things—the human soul."

A little gold amidst the gray;
 That's sunshine;
 A little brightness on the way—
 That's sunshine;
 A little spreading of the blue,
 A little widening of the view,
 A little heaven breaking through—
 That's sunshine.
 A little looking for the light—
 That's sunshine;
 A little patience through the night—
 That's sunshine;
 A little bowing of the will,

A little resting on the hill,
A little standing very still—

That's sunshine.

A little smiling through the tears—

That's sunshine;

A little faith behind the fears—

That's sunshine;

A little folding of the hand,

A little yielding of demand,

A little grace to understand—

That's sunshine.

(4) **Remember that the body bears a close relationship to the brain.** When the brain runs the body, the man is calm; when the body runs the brain, the man is nervous. Carlyle's health gave out when he was writing an essay on the life of Oliver Cromwell and Maurice remarks: "Carlyle believed in God down to the time of Oliver Cromwell." When Dr. J. W. Alexander was asked the question: "Do you enjoy the full assurance of faith?" his answer was: "I think I do, except when the wind is from the east." Drawing an illustration from my own experience, I may say, that when I used to solicit funds for a certain benevolent institution I made it a rule never to ask a man for a subscription when he was hungry. Napoleon, pointing to a certain spot on the map, remarked: "To-morrow at three o'clock I will have the enemy there, and when I get him there I will defeat him,"—so in my financial pilgrimages I always planned to focus my guns at the right man and at the right time. All my experiences led me to believe that I could get more money out of a man after dinner than before. I was an "after dinner" solicitor. A wise man respects his own body. Every ship has a load

line. When John Alexander Dowie worked twenty-four hours a day his visions were transformed into hallucinations. Even Christian Scientists must eat and sleep.

When the gods would destroy a man they urge him over the precipice of overwork.—“You wrote two books last year—write three books this year,” and so the books decrease in quality and the man breaks. One day’s rest in seven is a divine regulation and if you do not see fit to avail yourself of the appointed period of recreation at proper intervals, the chances are, you will take your Sundays in a row. When the violinist occupies five minutes tuning up his instrument, the audience grows weary. We like music but we are impatient of the fiddling process which seems to be necessary in order to revamp an instrument over which liquid notes may roll and through which divine vibration may pass exquisitely—but the violinist is sane—his instrument must be kept in tune. The human body is a marvelous harp of a thousand strings. Keep your physical frame in tune. In tune with the infinite? Yes, but first of all in tune with yourself. Don’t kill yourself by overwork. If you can’t, you can’t and that’s an end to it.

The cabinet minister said to Charles Stewart Parnell: “You have not answered my letter!” Parnell replied: “I guess you will find it among that heap of unopened letters on yonder table.” There were times when the Irish agitator had something better to do than to answer letters—destiny hinged on other details. He was not conducting a mail order department.

"Ah," says the successful business man. "Keep your correspondence up, Mr. Preacher, keep your correspondence up!" I might, if I had a score of underpaid stenographers to do my bidding, but the success of my pulpit efforts depend on a certain measure of daily, mental concentration. Letters or no letters, I'll preach. To use an Emmersonian expression, I am "primarily engaged" to my pulpit. God has not called me to conduct a correspondence school but to preach. Humanity first, pulpit preparations second and desk details when the mood is on. I would rather be a live preacher with a full church than a dead preacher with all my letters answered. Understand? But there are letters which I answer at once—the letters of the broken-hearted.

(5) **Eliminate the things concerning which it is absolutely useless to worry.** No man ever gave way beneath the burdens of to-day—it's to-morrow and its burdens which break the soul. There are two unlucky days—yesterday and to-morrow. The past is gone and gone forever. To-morrow has not yet arrived. Yesterday and to-morrow are sleeping dogs—let them lie. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. Three years ago William Howard Taft remarked to a circle of his boon companions: "When I consider all that has come to me of success, prosperity and good luck, I wonder, with trembling, if there is not to be some great misfortune to offset it all,"—and now Theodore is after him with a big stick. Trouble had to come, he was looking for it. Think much of an evil and it will find you. Let your motto be:

“one day at a time.” Remember the words of Goethe:—

“Like the star
That shines afar,
Without haste
And without rest,

Let each man wheel with steady sway,
Round the task that rules the day,
And do his best!”

(6) Remember that your gravest trouble is always your present trouble; and your present trouble will remain with you until a new trouble arrives. One trouble drives out another trouble, which simply means that one thought can drive out another thought. The troubles which are big to-day will be little to-morrow. A past generation worried over its sin. The present generation worries over itself. Both generations would have been stronger if occupied with higher thoughts. Remember your present anxious concern, no matter what the subject or object of it may be, will surrender in the presence of a new bogie. Your fears are fooling you. Your imagination is betraying you. You are dealing with a shadow which has no substance. In a week you will have forgotten both the old worry and the new. When somebody insulted James Boswell and anger kindled in his eye and wrath flamed in his face, Dr. Johnson, the fine old English philosopher, expostulated with him, saying: “Consider Sir, how insignificant this will appear to you twelve months hence!” Put your “worries” in cold storage and study them “in the calm light of” a falling barometer. The ancient philosophers affirmed that there was only one sentence which was absolutely true; it was expressed in these words: “And This Too Shall Pass

Away."

(7) Remember, too, that there are **First Class Troubles and Second Class Troubles**. If you are going to have worries, have big, large, fine, decent, respectable, aristocratic worries—worries which are worth worrying about. None of your cheap, "two for a cent," "four in a box," "three for a quarter," bargain-counter worries. Little people are easily recognizable—they brood over little troubles and hatch out little worries. Rescue life from its littleness. Near the desk of a business friend of mine I found a bill-board of suitable proportions installed, on which the captain of industry had tacked up bits of paper reminding him of "The Ten Most Important Things" on which he was determined to concentrate his mind during the current month. Save yourself for the big propositions. Remember, too, that the great Titanic-troubles of life come suddenly and without warning. There are icebergs in every sea. A great trouble calms a great soul. It was said of Carlyle that "little troubles annoyed him, but great troubles calmed him." When the domestic employed by John Stuart Mill, threw the manuscript of the first volume of Carlyle's "French Revolution" into the fire (mistaking it for a mass of greasy waste paper), and the work, toil and labor of three years disappeared in smoke—Carlyle said to his weeping companion: "Be calm, wife, be calm, we must not let Mill know how great our loss is!" There are two kinds of troubles—real and imaginary. Real troubles have to do with Life, Health and Character. "Worries" are the big shadows of little troubles.

(8) **Don't carry any burdens which you can engage anybody else to carry.** In some supreme moment of inspiration, when, in an eloquent outburst of thought, I forget myself and become dramatic, I might, in the recklessness of my pulpit abandon fall off this sacred ecclesiastical forum, and sustain injuries of a serious nature—but, my friends, I am not worrying about that. I carry an accident policy. I might possibly gain more by floating off the platform than by retaining my equilibrium. It is no concern of mine. Let the insurance company worry about that! That's what I pay them for. Insurance is scientific pre-worry—the only kind of worry which is scientific. If I were not a preacher I would be an insurance agent. They are the most abused benefactors of the race. Heaven bless them! An ounce of foresight is worth a ton of worry—full weight. Oliver Wendell Holmes hit the nail exactly on the top of the thought-dome, when he said: "Don't put your trust in money, but put your money in trust." "If my life depended upon the solving of a problem in two minutes," said a famous mathematician, "I would take one minute of the two in determining how to do it." Foresight—that's the word.

But you say: "Somebody must worry!" If this were not Sunday and I were not a preacher I would call that statement—a fib, a fabrication, a lie, but being a preacher I can simply affirm that your statement is a misstatement and as far from the truth as the Titanic was distant from the Grand Banks of Newfoundland when the field of ice intervened. Somebody must think, somebody must plan,

somebody must arrange, somebody must provide; but worry is the opposite of all these. Worry is nerve-fever. Worry is brain-friction. Worry is spinal-confusion. Worry is thought-anarchy. Worry is mind-fright. Worry is spiritual hysterics. When you begin to worry, you cease to think.

(9) The greatest degree that can be conferred is not "D.D.," but "D.W."—**Don't Worry.** Don't worry about your neatly attired children getting dirty. Dird is healthy. Don't worry about the dust on the piano—dust is absolutely the finest product of the material realm—there's nothing finer. Don't worry about the house being neat when the preacher calls—he is no better than anybody else (albeit he is probably the best mortal who ever crosses your door sill). Don't worry about what your neighbors will think—they are not thinking about you. Don't worry about how you look—only shallow people judge a man by what he has on. Don't worry about your physical frame or bodily health—you may already have outlived your usefulness. Don't worry about your reputation—most people know what you are.

But you answer: "Mr. Gordon, are you never tempted to worry?"—I am, indeed I am. And you inquire: "What do you do when you are tempted to worry?"—I preach on the subject. I prepare a "Royal George" on "The Day When Everything Goes Wrong," I never preached a sermon to myself that failed to fetch the audience. We are a good deal alike—my congregation and I. * * * "But, Mr. Gordon," persists my parishioner: "What would you do if—if—the door-bell was ringing—the telephone calling

—the delivery man at the back gate—
the dressmaker asking for instructions
—the dog tearing the lace curtains—
the children quarrelling—and the pas-
try burning in the oven—What would
you do?"—Speaking with a due meas-
ure of composure, and without the least
trace of excitement, I, (ah) I think I
would concentrate my attention on the
pastry hid away in the airtight com-
partments of the kitchen range.

But you expostulate: "Dear Pastor,
be serious, be serious!"—Beloved par-
ishioner, I can't be serious—I won't be
serious. The trouble is, you are alto-
gether too serious. Aye, serious about
a lot of things which are not worth be-
ing serious about. Give me a half-
baked meal with a smile, rather than a
superb banquet which would put the
chef of our Royal Alexandra to shame,
if it must be served with tears of wo-
manly anxiety and partaken of amid
thunderclouds of feminine concern. Be
serious—not at the dinner table—
thank you—it injures digestion and im-
pedes mental relaxation. "But," you
persist, "dear, dear pastor, what would
you do?" Well, there are only three
things which one could do under such
circumstances—swear, cry or laugh. It
would hardly be decent for a Christian
to swear; although sometimes we do in-
wardly, silently and subconsciously af-
firm and reaffirm certain mental convic-
tions which perhaps it would not be
wise or safe to vocalize or articulate.
It would be childish to cry—tears are
liquidized emotion—agony in solution.
Think of weeping over a cook-stove.
That particular kitchen utensil is hard-
ly worthy of such a baptism of genuine
feeling. Ah—Laugh! Laugh! Laugh!
That's the only decent thing for a

Christian to do. Laugh!

It is a psychological fact that you can't laugh and worry at the same time. There are two hundred and fifty muscles in the human face—a ripple of laughter sweeping over the face sends a wave of relaxation over the entire nervous system. I have a friend, an evangelist, who laughs, regularly, three times a day—mirth reduced to a system. Sir Walter Scott wrote: "I have great respect for a hearty laugh." Lord Byron was lame—he limped and sighed—sad creature! Sir Walter Scott was lame—he limped and laughed. Glad creature! Learn to laugh.

(10) **You ought to thank God you have something to be concerned about.** Charles Kingsley was dealing out a wise philosophy when he said: "Thank God, every morning, when you get up, that you have something to do, that day, which must be done, whether you like it or not." You ought to be willing to bear your share of the world's burdens. Edward Everett Hale, of "Lend A Hand" fame, advised: "If your spirits are low, **do something**, and if you **have** been doing something, **do something else.**"

"Employment, employment,
O, that is enjoyment.

There's nothing like something to do,
Good heart occupation
Is strength and salvation,
A secret that's known to but few."

(11) **Suppose the very worst should happen, the world would still go on.** All things work together for good—for everybody. The Titanic, the best ship ever built, has gone down, but we are to have better ships, better sailors, better life-boats, better sea-captains, better citizens and better mil-

lionaires. How Henry Ward Beecher used to worry about the future of Plymouth Church. A friend thus described his great anxiety: "I recall a conversation I had with him in his own parlor before he took his trip West in 1883. He then spoke about Plymouth Church and the strange composition of its membership. 'I believe,' he said, 'we have all denominations in Plymouth Church. We have Congregationalists, of course, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Methodists, Roman Catholics, or those who have been, Baptists, and I know not what others. Some from every fold. It saddens me most of all things,' he added, as he had said to so many, 'when I think of what will become of Plymouth Church after my departure.' " And yet Plymouth Church still lives and is perhaps doing its best work to-day. Two great men have already been heard from the same sacred platform where Beecher stood—Lyman Abbot and New-all Dwight Hillis.

Concern yourself but with To-day;
Woo it, and teach it to obey
Your will and wish. Since time began
To-day has been the friend of man,
But in his blindness and his sorrow
He looks to Yesterday and To-morrow.

The remedy for the little worries which wear into shreds the fabric of the soul is in the enthronement of certain great thoughts which like the snow-capped heights of Mount Lebanon can be seen from every nook and corner of life's broad domain. We must find what Bishop Wescott described as: "Repose among eternal things," we must pillow our heads on such words as those of the Hebrew poet: "Surely it shall be well with them that fear God." It is easy to die. It is hard to live. The

secret of peace is in "the power of an endless life." Remember, the soul is unsinkable. Memorize the words of Charles F. Richardson:—

If peace be in the heart,
The wildest winter storm is full of
beauty,

The midnight lightning flash but shows
the path of duty,

Each living creature tells some new and
joyous story,

The very trees and stones all cast a
ray of glory,

If peace be in the heart.

For life or for death the secret of a mind in perfect equipoise is peaceful relationships to all the powers unseen and spiritual. The church visitor, finding a Scotchman in a city hospital, sick and nigh unto death, tried to comfort the poor fellow by saying: "Well, you have one great comfort, you will soon be in heaven and rid of this poor, afflicted body." The old man looked up and smiled and said, "Heaven! I have been there ten years already." With that inward peace men have lived gloriously, even in haunts of poverty, and died exultantly in spite of pain, torture and decreasing strength. The immortal Cervantes, creator of "Don Quixote," died, exclaiming: "Good-bye, humors, good-bye, pleasant fancies; good-bye, merry friends; for I perceive I am dying, in the wish to see you happy in the other life."

"The world is wide

In time and tide,

And God is guide,

Men, do not hurry.

That man is blest

Who does his best

And leaves the rest,

Then do not worry."