

THE  
OPTIMIST'S  
HANDBOOK



MIALL  
EDWORTHY

PETRA  
CRAMSIE

THE  
PESSIMIST'S  
HANDBOOK

**THE  
OPTIMIST'S/PESSIMIST'S  
HANDBOOK**

A COMPANION TO HOPE AND DESPAIR

**NIAL EDWORTHY  
& PETRA CRAMSIE**

*Illustrations by Emily Faccini*

**THE  
OPTIMIST'S  
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a companion to hope

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## ABOUT THE BOOK

Humanity's story is one long testimony to the truth that life is what you make it - and how! Ever since we hauled ourselves out of the swamp our history has been one of extraordinary cultural and technological progress, of beautiful discoveries and remarkable achievements.

*The Optimist's Handbook* is a joyful explosion of wit and wisdom from past and present, that celebrates the art of greeting life with the excitement it deserves. A potent antidote to gloom and doom, it will inspire, enchant and entertain you as you go forward into all your wonderful tomorrows.

*To all children, especially Hope, Alfie, Francesco,  
Eliza, Joe, Delfina, Marianna and Danny*

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# PREFACE

‘For myself I am an optimist – it does not seem to be much use being anything else.’

WINSTON CHURCHILL

CAN YOU BELIEVE that, for every academic paper written on the subject of happiness, there are over a hundred written about depression? What is *wrong* with people? Does the sun not rise for these doom-mongers each morning? Do birds not sing and flowers not bloom for the pessimist? Stung into action by this outrage, we have produced *The Optimist’s Handbook*, an exhaustively researched and beautifully crafted work, to prove that these sour-faced miners of misery have been hacking away in the wrong pit all these years. As someone’s cheerful grandmother probably once said: ‘Pessimist! Leave thy slagheap of misery behind, and come celebrate life’s wealth of riches!’

If only they knew where to dig, they would quickly discover that, right beneath their dirty, sodden boots, lies a bottomless mine positively bursting with sparkling seams of nuggets and gems that celebrate Life. That’s *celebrate*, not *denigrate*. With infinite care, untold pleasure, and the encouragement of our superb editor, we have weighed and polished our precious finds for your enjoyment, trying them this way and that, moving some about, honing others into shape, always discarding the imperfect. As you will see, only the most glittering jewels remain, and each and every one of them has found its ideal setting, not only complementing

its neighbours perfectly, but making its own unique contribution to the whole illuminating display.

'We are all in the gutter,  
but some of us are looking at the stars.'

OSCAR WILDE

# A BEGINNER'S GUIDE



IT is never too late to become what you might have been.

ANON

HAD I been present at the Creation, I would have given some useful hints for the better ordering of the universe.

ALFONSO 'THE WISE' OF CASTILE, Spanish monarch, 1221-84



LIFE ain't all beer and skittles, and more's the pity;  
But what's the odds, so long as you're happy?

GEORGE DU MAURIER, *Punch* cartoonist, 1834-97



I CANNOT help being happy. I've struggled against it but no good. There is, I am well aware, no virtue whatever in this. It results from a combination of heredity, health, good fortune and shallow intellect.

ARTHUR MARSHALL, British broadcaster, 1910-89



## *The Call*

Sound, sound the clarion, fill the fife,  
Throughout the sensual world proclaim,  
One crowded hour of glorious life  
Is worth an age without a name.

THOMAS OSBERT MORDAUNT, British officer and poet, 1730–1809



I DO not believe that a world without evil, preferable in order to ours, is possible; otherwise it would have been preferred. It is necessary to believe that the mixture of evil has produced the greatest possible good: otherwise the evil would not have been permitted.

GOTTFRIED LEIBNIZ, German philosopher and mathematician, 1646–1716

ALL is for the best in the best of all possible worlds.

VOLTAIRE, *Candide, or Optimism*, 1759

THEY say everything in the world is good for something.

JOHN DRYDEN, *The Spanish Friar*, 1681



### *Happy Thought*

The world is so full of a number of things,  
I'm sure we should all be as happy as kings.

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON, 1850–94



OPTIMISM is essential to achievement and it is also the foundation of courage and true progress.

NICHOLAS MURRAY BUTLER, US presidential adviser, 1862–1947

TRULY the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun.

The Bible, Ecclesiastes 11:7

WHAT doesn't kill me only makes me stronger.

FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE, 1844–1900

I HAVE tried too in my time to be a philosopher; but, I don't know how, cheerfulness was always breaking in.

OLIVER EDWARDS to Samuel Johnson, in Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, 1791



- **If I keep a green bough in my heart, the singing bird will come**  
(CHINA)

THERE is one thing which gives radiance to everything. It is the idea of something around the corner.

G. K. CHESTERTON, 1874–1936

OPTIMISM is the cheerful frame of mind that enables a kettle to sing, though in hot water up to its nose.

ANON

WHAT'S lost upon the roundabouts we pulls up on the swings!

PATRICK REGINALD CHALMERS, Irish writer, 1872–1942, *Green Days and Blue Days*



What's the use of worrying?  
It never was worthwhile.  
So pack up your troubles in your old kit-bag  
And smile, smile, smile.

GEORGE ASAF, English lyricist, 1880–1951



*from 'The Collar'*

Is the year only lost to me?  
Have I no bays to crown it?  
No flowers, no garlands gay?  
All blasted?

All wasted?  
Not so, my heart; but there is fruit,  
And thou hast hands.

GEORGE HERBERT, English poet, 1593-1633



IT is one of the strange discoveries a man can make that life, however you lead it, contains moments of exhilaration; there are always comparisons that can be made with worse times; even in danger and misery the pendulum swings.

GRAHAM GREENE, *The Power and the Glory*, 1940

## HOPE ...

**... is the poor man's bread.**

GEORGE HERBERT

**... springs eternal in the human breast.**

ALEXANDER POPE, 1688-1744

**... is the last thing to abandon the unhappy.**



but wotthehell archy wotthehell  
jamais triste archy jamais triste  
that is my motto.

DON MARQUIS, US writer, *archy & mehitabel*, 1927



From *Optimism* by  
Helen Keller, 1880-1968

... MY optimism is grounded in two worlds, myself and what is about me. I demand that the world be good, and lo, it obeys. I proclaim the world good, and facts range themselves to prove my proclamation overwhelmingly true. To what is good I open the doors of my being, and jealously shut them against what is bad. Such is the force of this

beautiful and wilful conviction, it carries itself in the face of all opposition. I am never discouraged by absence of good. I never can be argued into hopelessness. Doubt and mistrust are the mere panic of timid imagination, which the steadfast heart will conquer, and the large mind transcend.

HOW wonderful to wake up in the morning and feel that one is lovely One!

DIANA MOSLEY, 1910-93, during her incarceration in Holloway Prison

I AM of a constitution so general, that it consorts and sympathiseth with all things.  
I have no antipathy, or rather idiosyncrasy, in diet, humour, air, anything.

SIR THOMAS BROWNE, 1605-82



### *Invictus*

Out of the night that covers me,  
Black as the Pit from pole to pole,  
I thank whatever gods may be  
For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance  
I have not winced nor cried aloud.  
Under the bludgeonings of chance  
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears  
Looms but the Horror of the shade,  
And yet the menace of the years  
Finds, and shall find, me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,  
How charged with punishments the scroll,

I am the master of my fate:  
I am the captain of my soul.

W. E. HENLEY, English poet, 1849–1903



There's a divinity that shapes our ends,  
Rough-hew them how we will

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, 1564–1616, *Hamlet*

SIR, I have never complained of the world; nor do I think that I have reason to complain. It is rather to be wondered at that I have so much.

SAMUEL JOHNSON, 1709–84

I CAME into the world at the right time, and I shall leave the world at the right time. I am content with whatever happens between the womb and the tomb; neither joy nor sorrow can touch me. I am free from all bonds.

CHUANG TZU, Taoist, 3rd century BC

MY country is the world, and my religion is to do good.

TOM PAINE, *The Rights of Man*, 1791

I AM by Nature made for my own good; not my own evil.

EPICETUS, Stoic philosopher, AD c. 55–135

I HAVE become my own version of an optimist. If I can't make it through one door, I'll go through another door – or I'll make a door. Something terrific will come no matter how dark the present.

RABINDRANATH TAGORE, Winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature, 1861–1941

GIVE me somewhere to stand, and I will move the earth.

ARCHIMEDES, 287–212 BC



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## Haiku

The thief left it behind: the moon at my window.

RYOKAN, Japanese poet, 1758–1831



THIS week has really been a week of great delight. Never have I had such irresistible, perpetual, & continued urgings of future greatness. I have been like a man with air balloons under his armpits and ether in his soul. While I was painting, or walking, or thinking, these beaming flashes of energy followed & impressed me! O God, grant they may not be presumptuous feelings. Grant they may be the fiery anticipations of a great Soul born to realise them ...

B. R. HAYDON, English writer, *Journals*, 29 April 1815

I AM always pleased to see my friends, happy to be with my wife and family, but the high-spot of every day is when I first catch a glimpse of myself in the shaving mirror.

ROBERT MORLEY, British actor, 1908–92

ERROR has never approached my spirit.

PRINCE METTERNICH, Austrian statesman, 1773–1859

WHAT a beautiful day for putting on a kilt, standing upside down in the middle of the road, and saying ‘How’s that for a table lamp?’

KEN DODD, British comedian, *Guardian*, 1991



- **While there’s life there’s hope**
- **There is more delight in hope than in enjoyment**

● **In the land of hope there is never any winter**

I BELIEVE in an ultimate decency of things.

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON, Scottish writer, 1850-94



Hence, loathed Melancholy,  
Of Cerberus and Blackest Midnight born  
In Stygian cave forlorn,  
'Mongst horrid shapes and shrieks and sights unholy!

JOHN MILTON, 1608-74, 'L'Allegro'



# ADVENTURE



IT is not the mountain we conquer but ourselves.

SIR EDMUND HILLARY, 1919–2008, with Sherpa Tenzing the first man to climb Everest

A FOOL ... is a man who never tried an experiment in his life.

ERASMUS DARWIN, English physician, 1731–1802

THE first question which you will ask and which I must try to answer is this, 'What is the use of climbing Mount Everest?' and my answer must at once be, 'It is no use.' There is not the slightest prospect of any gain whatsoever. Oh, we may learn a little about the behaviour of the human body at high altitudes, and possibly medical men may turn our observation to some account for the purposes of aviation. But otherwise nothing will come of it. We shall not bring back a single bit of gold or silver, not a gem, nor any coal or iron. We shall not find a single foot of earth that can be planted with crops to raise food. It's no use. So, if you cannot understand that there is something in man which responds to the challenge of this mountain and goes out to meet it, that the struggle is the struggle of life itself upward and forever upward, then you won't see why we go. What we get from this adventure is just sheer joy. And joy is, after all, the end of life. We do not live to eat and make money. We eat and make money to be able to enjoy life. That is what life means and what life is for.

English mountaineer GEORGE MALLORY, who died on the slopes of Everest in 1924. The discovery of his body in 1999 revived speculation as to whether he and his climbing partner Andrew Irvine had made it to the summit before they perished.

THE church says the earth is flat, but I know that it is round, for I have seen the shadow on the moon, and I have more faith in a shadow than in the church.

FERDINAND MAGELLAN, Portuguese explorer, c. 1480-1521

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*In 2002, Brock Enright, a 25-year-old artist, launched a 'designer kidnapping' business for bored New Yorkers looking for some adventure in their lives. Dozens of customers paid Brock and his team between \$1,500 and \$4,000 to be violently abducted. (Costs varied according to the level of danger involved.) Each kidnap was tailored to meet the tastes and phobias of the client, but most chose to be seized at a secret location, bound, gagged, blindfolded, taken away and slapped around for hours, or even days. Customers were abducted in the street, or in their beds at night. 'It's about stepping outside of yourself. I wanted to see what I could do,' said Jason, a carpenter, after his third abduction.*

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DO just once what others say you can't do, and you will never pay attention to their limitations again.

CAPTAIN JAMES COOK, English explorer, 1728-79

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*'IT'S an incredible bargain at \$100 million a seat,' says Eric Anderson, president and CEO of Space Adventures about his plans to fly two private citizens to the far side of the moon. 'I believe there's a bigger market than people might imagine.' Space Adventures, the pioneers of space tourism, have already flown five customers to the International Space Station (ISS) at a cost to each of roughly \$25 million, but the lunar adventure is by far their most ambitious*

*project to date. The US firm promises that, for \$100 million, the intrepid lunar tourist will get to lead the first important manned space expedition of the 21st century; become a catalyst for humankind's expansion into space; join the ranks of the world's greatest explorers; experience the majesty and wonder of earthrise and explore and experience the far side of the moon.*

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I AM actually not at all a man of science, not an observer, not an experimenter, not a thinker. I am by temperament nothing but a conquistador - an adventurer, if you want it translated - with all the curiosity, daring, and tenacity characteristic of a man of this sort.

SIGMUND FREUD, letter to Wilhelm Fliess, 1 February 1900

MAN cannot discover new oceans unless he has the courage to lose sight of the shore.

ANDRÉ GIDE, French writer, 1869-1951

# AFRICA



*EX Africa semper aliquid novi.* (Something new always comes out of Africa.)

PLINY THE ELDER, AD 23-79

THE future is bright. We are dealing with positive changes ... The economies are better, elections are taking place in many African states, presidents are willing to leave offices, and there are no coups these days.

SIR QUETT KETUMILE JONI MASIRE, former president of Botswana, b. 1925

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*The earliest known proof of human existence and civilization came from Africa. Lucy, our common ancestor, the 3.2-million-year-old fossil celebrity, was uncovered in an archaeological dig in Ethiopia. She lies in a specially constructed safe at the palaeoanthropology laboratories of the National Museum of Ethiopia in Addis Ababa.*

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*When it comes to culture in all its forms, Africa is on top. Recent years have seen many African writers rewarded. Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe won the 2007 Man Booker International Prize and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, also Nigerian, won the Orange Prize for Fiction. The same year, Ethiopian émigré Dinaw Mengestu won the Guardian First Novel Award. In France, Congolese writer Alain Mabanckou won the prestigious Prix Renaudot in 2006. Africa too, in many ways, is music's past and future. Without Africa there*

*would be no blues, samba, calypso, gospel, soul, reggae, rap, salsa, jazz, etc. As for football, Africa is a hotbed of talent. From Didier Drogba to Emmanuel Eboué, Africa's footballers are providing the world's clubs with energy and skill. According to Robert Nouzaret, coach of the Guinea team, the 2010 World Cup is bound to have African teams reaching the semi-finals.*

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*Nelson Mandela remains one of the most revered figures of our times. This is the man who once said, 'It always seems impossible until it's done.' He also famously declared in a courtroom in 1964: 'I have dedicated my life to this struggle of the African people. I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideals of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for, and to see realized. But my lord, if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die.'*

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*The Xhosa people of South Africa have a word, Ubuntu. It means that we are human in and through one another. We are all intertwined and part of each other.*

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**I AM not interested in picking up crumbs of compassion thrown from the table of someone who considers himself my master. I want the full menu of human rights.**

ARCHBISHOP DESMOND TUTU, South African activist, b. 1931

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*Necessity is the mother of invention. Nowhere is this truer than in Africa, where people recycle plastic bags into mats, tins into suitcases and tyres into shoes. Poverty in Africa has bred inventiveness and resilience, rather than submission. To see or buy some of the extraordinary objects made from*

*recycled material in Africa visit [www.csao.fr](http://www.csao.fr) and [www.larbreduvoyageur.com](http://www.larbreduvoyageur.com), two gallery shops in Paris.*

## A HANDFUL OF OPTIMISTIC AFRICAN NATIONAL MOTTOS:

**Burkina Faso:** Unité, Travail, Progrès (Unity, Work, Progress)

**Cameroon:** Paix, Travail, Patrie (Peace, Work, Fatherland)

**Côte d'Ivoire:** Unité, Discipline, Travail (Unity, Discipline, Work)

**Kenya:** Harambee (Let's Work Together)

**Mali:** Un Peuple, Un But, Une Foi (One People, One Goal, One Faith)

**Rwanda:** Unity, Work and Patriotism

# AFTERLIFE



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Coming and going by  
the dance, I see  
that what I am not is  
a part of me.  
Dancing is all that I  
can ever trust,  
the dance is all I am,  
the rest is dust.  
I will believe my bones  
and live by what  
will go on dancing when  
my bones are not.

SYDNEY CARTER, 1915–2004, from 'My Believing Bones'



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... IN the next world I shan't be doing music, with all the  
striving and disappointments. I shall be being it.

RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS, English composer, 1872–1958

MY heaven will be filled with wonderful young men and  
dukes.

DAME BARBARA CARTLAND, 1901–2000

BUT the true servants of God shall be well provided for, feasting on fruit, and honoured in the gardens of delight. Reclining face to face upon soft couches, they shall be served with a goblet filled at a gushing fountain, white, and delicious to those who drink it. It will neither dull their senses nor befuddle them. They shall sit with bashful, dark-eyed virgins, as chaste as the sheltered eggs of ostriches.

The Koran, Surah 37:39-47, translated by N. J. Dawood

BEHOLD, I show you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.

O death, where is thy sting?

O grave, where is thy victory?

The Bible, 1 Corinthians 15: 51-5



O Death, where is thy sting-a-ling-a-ling,  
O Grave, thy victoree?  
The bells of Hell go ting-a-ling-a-ling,  
For you, but not for me.

First World War army song



## **I'll be wrapped around your finger**

*Nowadays, carbon-based life-forms needn't end up as ashes or bones, we can be made into jewellery and be on hand at*

*all times. LifeGem, of Chicago, Illinois, will take a few grains of your cremated remains and subject them to high pressure and temperature. After 18 weeks, you'll emerge sparkling. Go to [www.LifeGem.com](http://www.LifeGem.com) to find out more about becoming a Memorial Diamond.*

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HOW can it enter into the thoughts of man, that the soul, which is capable of such immense perfections, and of receiving new improvements to all eternity, shall fall away into nothing almost as soon as it is created?

JOSEPH ADDISON, English essayist, 1672-1719

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*For the ancient Egyptians, death was a mere break in existence, and nothing to fear if you had a clear conscience. Your friends would mummify you to help you on your way, and you would then, after journeying to the land of the dead, enter the 'Hall of Double Justice', in order to affirm to the 42 judges that you had committed no sin. After having your heart weighed against Truth in a huge pair of scales, Osiris, the God of the Dead, would give judgement. If the scales were in equilibrium he would pronounce in your favour, and from then on you would lead a life of eternal happiness in the kingdom of the dead.*

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*A BBC MORI poll, conducted in 2003, found that 52 per cent of people in the United Kingdom believed in Heaven, but only 32 per cent believed in Hell.*

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A thousand tymes have I herd men telle  
That ther ys joy in hevене and peyne in helle,  
And I acorde wel that it ys so;  
But, natheless, yet wot I wel also  
That ther nis noon dwelling in this contree,