

# QUIT

## Picking on Yourself

By WILLIAM S. SADLER, M. D.

Cartoons by F. G. Cooper

**R**ALPH was next to the youngest in a very gifted and talented family of nine children. Among his older brothers and sisters were the champion debater of the local high school, an athletic brother who had all but broken a half-dozen track records, a sister who was a talented musician, and another sister who was no mean painter. But Ralph didn't seem to have any special gifts. He used to hear his father and mother remark on the fact that he didn't appear to be as talented as the other children, and wonder what he would ever amount to. Naturally, poor overshadowed Ralph grew up with the feeling that he was practically a nit-wit.

Although he finished high school with fairly good grades, he refused to go to college. He was afraid he would flunk and disgrace the family. So he went to work in the business world and developed more and more into a melancholy lad, with repressed emotions. By the time he was twenty he had a first class, A-No. 1 inferiority complex working twenty-four hours of the day.

Ralph became so nervous and despondent that his father brought him to me, saying, "Doctor, there must be something wrong with this boy. He is so unlike his brothers and sisters. He doesn't seem to take an interest in anything, and he is getting worse."

A thorough overhauling of Ralph revealed just one thing—a deep-seated, well-grounded inferiority complex. He felt he was destined to be a failure in life, and that settled it. When he opened up to tell his story, he wept profusely about it. He had often thought of running away from his family to save them from the humiliation of his presence, but he doubted his ability to make a living. His inferiority complex kept him from picking up and striking out for himself, which in his case would have been the making of him. It was impossible to talk him out of his melancholy state.

I had several conversations with his mother, and learned that the only thing for which he had been commended in high school was his essays. Thereupon I conceived the idea that he might have some latent ability as a writer. I thought I would take a chance and try to develop it, so I sent for Ralph and pitched right into him. I asked him to produce a thesis of some sort within thirty days and submit it to me. He did, and for a first attempt it was quite good. After criticizing it and having it revised, I asked him to write a second one, and then a third. The third struck me as being good enough to sell. But Ralph started in at his old tricks. No;



he had no interest in such things; it wasn't any good anyway; it would come back; he couldn't write—thus ran the tenor of his comments. But I insisted that he send his manuscript to a list of magazines.

**F**IVE times the article was rejected, but the sixth time a check for fifty dollars came. Ralph came over to see me. I never saw such a change in a human being in my life. There was fire in his eyes, his face was lighted with enthusiasm, even the tone of his voice had changed. Clenching his fist, he pounded the desk, and said, "Gee, but it's great to find out you can do something! I have thought of half a dozen other things I want to do. I'm going to sit on top of the world from now on."

Well, that is about all there is to this story. Ralph's promotions have been rapid. He has a position of trust with his firm, and has written two books and scores of magazine articles. He has no desire to give up his connection with the business world to become an author. He knows that he is not a literary world-beater, but his writing serves as an emotional outlet, an avenue of self-expression. It is the club that successfully swatted his inferiority complex, and beat it into a shapeless pulp.

While it may be a bit far-fetched for parents to try to raise every boy with the Presidency of the United States in view, it is better to suggest the improbable, and even the impossible, to our children, rather than speak to them in a disparaging and discouraging way about their future prospects. It is easier to curb an exaggeration of ego in a child than fight an inferiority complex.

We should all be willing to recognize and admit our shortcomings and faults; but when we get into the habit of *picking* on ourselves, finding fault with ourselves over trifles; when we feel on an equality with the worms—there's trouble ahead.

**A**S a physician, I am constantly meeting hyperconscientious individuals, who, having done their best, always blame themselves for not having done better. I recently asked a middle-aged woman patient what her real trouble was and, after thinking for a moment, she said:

"Well, I guess my difficulty is that I am never satisfied with anything I do. Even when I know I've done my best, I feel I might have done better, and blame myself for my deficiencies."

Now, people who fall into this terrible rut of chronically chiding themselves are never going to amount to anything. Just because they can't write like Shakespeare or play like Kreisler is no reason why they should crawl into their holes and sit bemoaning their fates. I don't believe in smug self-satisfaction, but I do believe in a wise understanding of our limitations.

I have a dear friend who is a bit of a problem to me. He makes life miserable for himself and others by continually apologizing. I never meet him that he does not apologize for something or other. He is always afraid that he has hurt someone's feelings or slighted a friend in some way or other. He cannot get into a good-natured discussion and take sides without apologizing for his opinions, which, he fears, may wound the susceptibilities of someone present. It's getting beyond a joke. He'll soon be apologizing for encumbering the earth.

I've told this man that, in order to cure himself of this distressing habit, he'll have to follow, for a time at least, the advice of the famous man who said, "Never apologize and never explain." It's going to be hard, but having got off on the wrong foot something drastic has to be done. I believe in apologies when apologies are due; but there is no need to explain and apologize every step of the way.

This man's habit of apologizing, which is a reflection of his own keen sensitivity to slights, imaginary and otherwise,

has completely colored his world. Fearful lest his most insignificant action be misinterpreted, he launches forth into a long explanation, and then apologizes for having to explain.

My friend, in order to be cured of his inferiority complex, has to grow another layer of skin, so that his epidermis won't be pricked by every slight; he must learn that few people go around with the deliberate intent to wound others. He must also learn that continual apologizing is lowering to one's self-respect and esteem. It's a curious thing about this man: although he has an inferiority complex he is, at the same time, the victim of an inflated ego. The fact that he feels everyone is criticizing his conduct or feeling slighted over some little lapse of courtesy on his part shows how important he imagines himself to be in the lives of others. A deflation of his ego will put him on the right road to solving his problem, because just as soon as he realizes everything he does is not so all-fired important to others, he won't feel the need to explain and apologize.

RECENTLY I met a business man who picked on himself so hard that he made himself sick. He worried over minor things in his business dealings. He kept debating with himself as to whether this or that particular transaction was absolutely right and fair. Finally, he reached the point where to make a profit in a business transaction was wrong; he was taking unfair advantage of his fellow men.

This attitude of mind, of course, couldn't continue, if the man was to keep his health and his business. A number of conversations revealed the trouble. He had had his mind stirred up on this subject by a verse in the Bible condemning usury. He began worrying about what usury was. And the more he worried, the more run-down he became.

Finally, he fell a victim to the idea that any reasonable profit was profiteering. When we once got to the bottom of the trouble it was just a question of bringing him back to normalcy again by building up his health and disabusing his mind of the profiteering idea. Eventually he saw things from a common-sense standpoint.

A lot of our troubles could be side-stepped if we would only check ourselves up in reference to common sense. The average viewpoint is usually fairly sane,

## Be Yourself!

By Arthur Guiterman

WHEN out for a walk, while the town was sleeping,  
I saw a little Ant on an ant-hill, weeping;  
His tears rolled down with a splash and a spatter  
Till I sobbed, "Little Ant, what's the mat-mat-matter?"  
He moaned as he gestured with his long antennae,  
"I'm just no good, and I'm not worth a penny;  
I long to be a Bird, or a great big Mammal,  
An Elephant, a Gnu, a Giraffe, or a Camel;  
I wish and I would, but there's no use a-tryin',  
For I can't be a Buffalo, a Leopard, nor a Lion;  
The world is so huge and I am so wee,  
And there isn't any place for a mite like me!"

I soothed the little Ant with my courtesy meticulous  
And said, "Noble friend, this is utterly ridiculous.  
I don't know a lot, yet I know mighty well if Ants  
Live as they should they're as worthwhile as Elephants.  
We've overmuch of Lionhood and loads of Elephantery;  
The need of all the Universe is pure and perfect Antery.  
A silver dime is better than a pewtery simoleon,  
A true John Brown than a try-to-be Napoleon.  
Then be what you can, never mind what you can't;  
Mere Lions must be Lions, but You are an Ant!"

The little Ant considered, and he finished up his worrying,  
And soon he was hurrying and hurrying and scurrying,  
Piling grains of sand while it seemed that he would never rest  
Until he'd made the ant-heap high as Mount Everest,  
Butting into flowers till his head was all polleeny,  
Gathering provisions for the whole Ant colony.  
And when I came again, the hill was swarming;  
The Queen was there, and her generals were forming  
The big bull Ants and the tiniest rascallions  
In regiments, brigades, divisions, and battalions  
With military bands; for the eager population  
Was tendering the Ant a magnificent ovation,  
While the bass drum boomed and the bagpipe skirled,  
"He's the finest little Ant in the whole wide world!"

natural, and normal, and we should always take stock of ourselves when we move very far to either extreme as regards normal reactions of normal men and women to the problems of daily life.

While writing this article, I received a letter from a woman, now almost fifty years of age, in which she tells the story of the gradual development of an inferiority complex. The letter is helpful, as it shows how such a complex develops. She says: "When a child, if I complained of pain

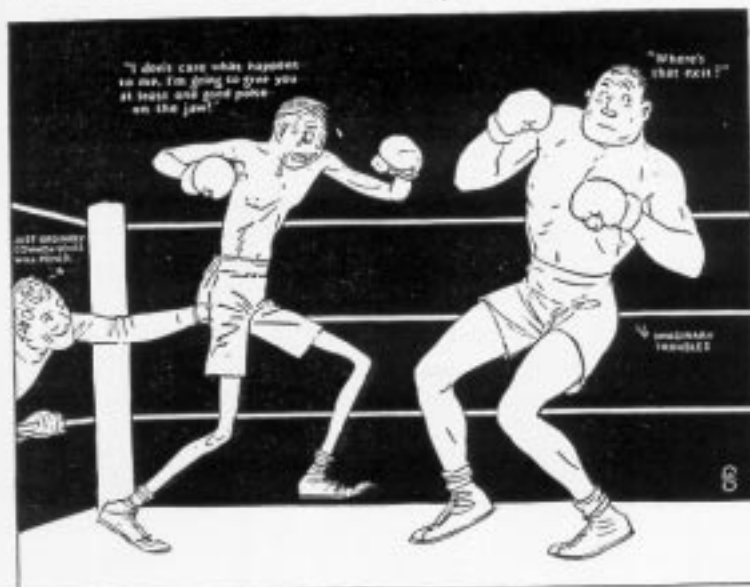
trouble, I guess, when I got home. About this time I got hold of a book that gave me a little religious consolation, or I don't know what would have happened. The people with whom I worked were all older than I, and I was so green that I afforded them a great deal of amusement. This all contributed to the formation of a deep-seated inferiority complex.

"About this time something went wrong with my heart, and I couldn't work regularly; and then, when I would stay home, I can remember hearing them say, 'Well, she can work when she wants to. I don't see where she gets this lazy streak.'

"In a short time I found lighter work at very small wages, and this also contributed to lowering my self-respect. But I sometimes wonder what I might have been if I had only had a reasonable chance.

"I am afraid to trust my own judgment. I don't want to face any responsibility.

"Even when people try to be nice to me, I have such a twisted view of things that I am afraid. I think it is because they are sorry for me, because they pity me. I recall what my  
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mother once said to me: "Oh, they don't want you, they just asked you because you hung around, and they had to get rid of you."

"I notice every little seeming slight. I am very sensitive, and exceedingly self-conscious."

"It is hard for me to receive a favor and feel that it is given in friendship, or that I in any way deserve it. I always feel that everybody is looking down on me."

"I shun intimate social contacts because of the feeling that, just as soon as people get acquainted with me, they will discover my weaknesses and limitations, and then they will have nothing to do with me."

"I am afraid to think. I was afraid to express myself when young because I would be charged with foolishness, and now my brain will hardly work. I have had to get along with poor positions because I was afraid to take a better position even when it was offered to me."

Others who read this may, in varying degrees, see themselves; how they have been handicapped throughout a longer or shorter life by these fears of inferiority. It is a fact that if we constantly pick on our children when they are young, they will later on develop the habit of picking on themselves. And once that habit is formed—well, it's good-bye to happiness and self-realization until the unfortunate owner of the complex gets rid of it.

**I**F YOU feel that you are drifting into the formation of an inferiority complex, break away, if it is humanly possible, from your surroundings, and strike out for yourself somewhere else. If it's your family that is a paralyzing influence, leave it. This sounds like harsh advice, but it is much better to take the step in the beginning, before your inferiority complex gets in its deadly work, than wait until your strength has been sapped.

An offshoot of this inferiority feeling is indecision. Thousands upon thousands of good people suffer from it. They work very well as a cog in a machine; but the moment they have to take a stand or make a decision for themselves they are scared to death.

I have a patient who is too conscientious over his decisions. He is afraid he will decide things wrongly. He worries all day over trifles. If he goes to buy a suit or a hat, he has to go back two or three times.

"The best thing you can do," I said to him, "is to flip a coin when you want to decide some minor affair." He took my advice. Now, when some trifle comes up, it is "Heads I do and tails I don't." He is getting over the idea that every little thing in life is important.

I know a woman at the present time who for more than a dozen years has refused to take the responsibility for the most trivial decisions. She has to consult a neighbor, or her minister, call on the doctor, or ring up her husband, before she can decide anything. As near as I can find out, her parents failed to teach her how to bear responsibility when she was young. Her mother was always right by

er. She tells me that she was never even permitted to wash the dishes entirely alone, or cook anything on her own responsibility. Parents make a great mistake in not very early teaching children to bear responsibility, make decisions, take the initiative, and to go through with things alone.

**N**OW, there is only one way to cure indecision, and that is to make decisions. Sounds obvious, but most truth is. If you have a tendency toward indecision, go and deliberately put yourself where you will have to decide things. Don't talk and hedge—act. You'll make wrong decisions occasionally. But don't let a few mistakes faze you. Decide, and act.

We are constantly meeting folks who are worried almost to death over some physical peculiarity—their noses are too big, or there is something wrong with their eyes, or their eyebrows; maybe their chins aren't just right, their Adam's apple works like an elevator, or their hair begins to fall out.

We must remember that we are not to blame for the physiques we have, except as we fail to take care of them and make the best of what our ancestors wished on us. The world is full of all kinds of people, and, generally speaking, we are no more defective or deficient than the average run of folks.

Then we have another group of people who are constantly picking on themselves spiritually, morally. They think they are not so good as other folks. Of course they probably would resent it if anyone else made the comment; but they seem to get a great deal of consolation out of condemning themselves. I don't doubt this glorified pseudo-humility gives them a great deal of satisfaction. But it's bad business.

If you belong to this group, keep your eyes on the great patterns and ideals, and quit picking on yourself. Develop a religion that is based on "looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith."

Another group of people who go through life, stepping softly and fearfully, are those who feel inferior through lack of education. Just because they are not high-school or college graduates they are afraid to express an opinion. The time has come when you should realize that by reading and studying you can possess yourself of all the facts that any high-school or college graduate has, and that by mingling with the world and gaining *practical experience* you get something which none of them have, unless they obtain it after their school days.

If your town has a public library, you have an education right there on its shelves as far as book knowledge is concerned; but, remember, real education, real culture, consists in the development of the character, as an outgrowth of mingling and associating with your fellow men.

Not long ago I had a patient who told me he felt very small and insignificant among his friends because they were constantly talking about geology. I gave him a list of three or four books, and told him

I would give him ninety days to get posted on the subject. At the end of that time my friend was ready to talk to any college professor on geology. He can pick up a stone any time, and tell you its origin, history, and destiny. Inferiority complex! He's forgotten he ever had one.

Quit bemoaning the knowledge you have lost by not going to school, because you can easily make up for that by study. There is no excuse for having an inferiority complex regarding education and intellectual attainments. If you are lacking in anything, get busy and acquire it.

That's the method by which we brought a backward, bashful, reticent woman out of her shell. Her personality was absolutely stunted. By getting her to read periodicals on current events, and digesting the newspapers daily, we have put her in a position where she can discuss intelligently the things that are going on in the world today. We taught her to initiate conversations, and discreetly to direct topics along the lines she feels competent to discuss. She is emerging from her shell in a wonderful fashion.

ONE of the most pathetic cases of inferiority complexes that I've run across is that of a grown lad whose mother, a widow, kept him so tied to her apron strings that he's a regular "sissy." One day when he did make his escape and went out to play ball, the boys all laughed and shouted, "Oh, look at him! Henry throws just like a girl." He never tried to play ball again.

Poor Henry—he never had a childhood, from a boy's standpoint. Fortunately, his mother has begun to see the light and has consented that Henry leave her for a year or two. We are going to pack him off to a camp first, so as to get him acclimated to a vigorous outdoor life; then we'll send him to school, where, we hope, his school-mates will finish the work of severing the apron strings.

Parents make a great mistake in over-sheltering and over-protecting their children. Give them a chance to think, to act, to decide; encourage it, indeed force it. Don't let your children grow up as molly-coddles.

One of the first things a person with a tendency to an inferiority complex should learn is to be a *good loser*. You know we can't always be on top of the heap, and it is a wonderful help in overcoming this tendency to pick on yourself, to get accustomed to the idea that you are going to lose occasionally. This is why I like to see young people play games, go into athletics, and join debating groups at school.

Moreover, we shall have less to pick on ourselves about if we treat most of the passing events in life as relatively trivial. Don't, when you have done your best, indulge in useless and unfair criticism of yourself. Condemnation of this sort is weakening both physically and morally.

One of the best codes of living I know was prescribed by Edward Everett Hale:

To look up and not down,  
To look forward and not back,  
To look out and not in, and  
To lend a hand.

This prescription, closely followed, will cure any case of inferiority complex, no matter of how long standing.

