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Quotes by Mencken, H. L.

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Henry Louis Mencken (September 12, 1880 - January 29, 1956), better known as H. L. Mencken, was a twentieth-century journalist, satirist, social critic, cynic, and freethinker, known as the "Sage of Baltimore" and the "American Nietzsche". He is often regarded as one of the most influential American writers of the early 20th century.

The only cure for contempt is counter-contempt.

- Mencken, H. L.

The older I grow the more I distrust the familiar doctrine that age brings wisdom.

- Mencken, H. L.

Don't overestimate the decency of the human race.

- Mencken, H. L.

The cure for the evils of democracy is more democracy.

- Mencken, H. L.

Democracy is the theory that the common people know what They want, and deserve to get it good and hard.

- Mencken, H. L.

Democracy is also a form of religion. It is the worship of jackals by jackasses.

- Mencken, H. L.

I confess I enjoy democracy immensely. It is incomparably idiotic, and hence incomparably amusing.

- Mencken, H. L.

Men become civilized, not in proportion to their willingness to believe, but in proportion to their readiness to doubt.

- Mencken, H. L.

The lunatic fringe wags the underdog.

- Mencken, H. L.

It is hard for the ape to believe he descended from man.

- Mencken, H. L.

Faith may be defined briefly as an illogical belief in the occurrence of the improbable.

- Mencken, H. L.

A celebrity is one who is known to many persons he is glad he doesn't know.

- Mencken, H. L.

Every man sees in his relatives, and especially in his cousins, a series of grotesque caricatures of himself.

- Mencken, H. L.

No one hates his job so heartily as a farmer.

- Mencken, H. L.

No matter how happily a woman may be married, it always pleases her to discover that there is a nice man who wishes that she were not.

- Mencken, H. L.

We must be willing to pay a price for freedom.

- Mencken, H. L.

A gentleman is one who never strikes a woman without provocation.

- Mencken, H. L.

On one issue at least, men and women agree; they both distrust women.

- Mencken, H. L.

A prohibitionist is the sort of man one couldn't care to drink with, even if he drank.

- Mencken, H. L.

Alimony -- the ransom that the happy pay to the devil.

- Mencken, H. L.

God is the immemorial refuge of the incompetent, the helpless, the miserable. They find not only sanctuary in His arms, but also a kind of superiority, soothing to their macerated egos: He will set them above their betters.

- Mencken, H. L.

The objection of the scandalmonger is not that she tells of racy doings, but that she pretends to be indignant about them.

- Mencken, H. L.

Government is actually the worst failure of civilized man. There has never been a really good one, and even those that are most tolerable are arbitrary, cruel, grasping and unintelligent.

- Mencken, H. L.

As the arteries grow hard, the heart grows soft.

- Mencken, H. L.

In war the heroes always outnumber the soldiers ten to one.

- Mencken, H. L.

Historian -- an unsuccessful novelist.

- Mencken, H. L.

Honor is simply the morality of superior men.

- Mencken, H. L.

Have you ever watched a crab on the shore crawling backward in search of the Atlantic Ocean, and missing? That's the way the mind of man operates.

- Mencken, H. L.

Man is a beautiful machine that works very badly.

- Mencken, H. L.

The basic fact about human existence is not that it is a tragedy, but that it is a bore. It is not so much a war as an endless standing in line.

- Mencken, H. L.

Strike an average between what a woman thinks of her husband a month before she marries him and what she thinks of him a year afterward, and you will have the truth about him.

- Mencken, H. L.

Husbands never become good; they merely become proficient.

- Mencken, H. L.

Hygiene is the corruption of medicine by morality. It is impossible to find a hygienist who does not debase his theory of the healthful with a theory of the virtuous. The true aim of medicine is not to make men virtuous; it is to safeguard and rescue them from the consequences of their vices.

- Mencken, H. L.

An idealist is one who, on noticing that a rose smells better than a cabbage, concludes that it is also more nourishing.

- Mencken, H. L.

There is nothing worse than an idle hour, with no occupation offering. People who have many such hours are simply animals waiting docilely for death. We all come to that state soon or late. It is the curse of senility.

- Mencken, H. L.

It is impossible to imagine the universe run by a wise, just and omnipotent God, but it is quite easy to imagine it run by a board of gods. If such a board actually exists it operates precisely like the board of a corporation that is losing money.

- Mencken, H. L.

The curse of man, and the cause of nearly all his woe, is his stupendous capacity for believing the incredible.

- Mencken, H. L.

The penalty for laughing in a courtroom is six months in jail; if it were not for this penalty, the jury would never hear the evidence.

- Mencken, H. L.

Injustice is relatively easy to bear what stings is justice.

- Mencken, H. L.

When women kiss it always reminds one of prize-fighters shaking hands.

- Mencken, H. L.

One horse-laugh is worth ten thousand syllogisms. It is not only more effective; it is also vastly more intelligent.

- Mencken, H. L.

A judge is a law student who grades his own papers.

- Mencken, H. L.

Say what you will about the Ten Commandments, you must always come back to the

pleasant fact that there are only ten of them.

- Mencken, H. L.

Legend : a lie that has attained the dignity of age.

- Mencken, H. L.

The idea that leisure is of value in itself is only conditionally true. The average man simply spends his leisure as a dog spends it. His recreations are all puerile, and the time supposed to benefit him really only stupefies him.

- Mencken, H. L.

I believe in only one thing: liberty; but I do not believe in liberty enough to want to force it upon anyone.

- Mencken, H. L.

The truth that survives is simply the lie that is pleasantest to believe.

- Mencken, H. L.

Lying is not only excusable; it is not only innocent; it is, above all, necessary and unavoidable. Without the ameliorations that it offers, life would become a mere syllogism and hence too metallic to be borne.

- Mencken, H. L.

Life is a dead-end street.

- Mencken, H. L.

Love is an emotion that is based on an opinion of women that is impossible for those who have had any experience with them.

- Mencken, H. L.

Love is the delusion that one man or woman differs from another.

- Mencken, H. L.

Love is the triumph of imagination over intelligence.

- Mencken, H. L.

To be in love is merely to be in a perpetual state of anesthesia.

- Mencken, H. L.

If I ever marry it will be on a sudden impulse, as a man shoots himself.

- Mencken, H. L.

Whenever a husband and wife begin to discuss their marriage they are giving evidence at a coroner's inquest.

- Mencken, H. L.

For it is mutual trust, even more than mutual interest that holds human associations together. Our friends seldom profit us but they make us feel safe. Marriage is a scheme to accomplish exactly that same end.

- Mencken, H. L.

Man is always looking for someone to boast to; woman is always looking for a shoulder to put her head on.

- Mencken, H. L.

A man's women folk, whatever their outward show of respect for his merit and authority, always regard him secretly as an ass, and with something akin to pity. His most gaudy sayings and doings seldom deceive them; they see the actual man within, and know him for a shallow and pathetic fellow. In this fact, perhaps, lies one of the best proofs of feminine intelligence, or, as the common phrase makes it, feminine intuition.

- Mencken, H. L.

Men have a much better time of it than women. For one thing, they marry later, for another thing, they die earlier.

- Mencken, H. L.

Man weeps to think that he will die so soon; woman, that she was born so long ago.

- Mencken, H. L.

A metaphysician is one who, when you remark that twice two makes four, demands to

know what you mean by twice, what by two, what by makes, and what by four. For asking such questions metaphysicians are supported in oriental luxury in the universities, and respected as educated and intelligent men.

- Mencken, H. L.

The most valuable of all human possessions, next to a superior and disdainful air, is the reputation of being well-to-do.

- Mencken, H. L.

The chief value of money lies in the fact that one lives in a world in which it is overestimated.

- Mencken, H. L.

Time is the great equalizer in the field of morals.

- Mencken, H. L.

Morality is the theory that every human act must be either right or wrong, and that 99 % of them are wrong.

- Mencken, H. L.

The difference between a moral man and a man of honor is that the latter regrets a discreditable act, even when it has worked and he has not been caught.

- Mencken, H. L.

The opera is to music what a bawdy house is to a cathedral.

- Mencken, H. L.

A nun, at best, is only half a woman, just as a priest is only half a man.

- Mencken, H. L.

Opera in English, is about as sensible as baseball in Italian.

- Mencken, H. L.

A society made up of individuals who were all capable of original thought would probably be unendurable.

- Mencken, H. L.

Whenever you hear a man speak of his love for his country, it is a sign that he expects to be paid for it.

- Mencken, H. L.

Philosophy consists very largely of one philosopher arguing that all others are jackasses.

He usually proves it, and I should add that he also usually proves that he is one himself.

- Mencken, H. L.

There is no record in history of a happy philosopher.

- Mencken, H. L.

The average man does not get pleasure out of an idea because he thinks it is true; he thinks it is true because he gets pleasure out of it.

- Mencken, H. L.

Women have simple tastes. They get pleasure out of the conversation of children in arms and men in love.

- Mencken, H. L.

Bachelors have consciences, married men have wives.

- Mencken, H. L.

Bachelors know more about women than married men; if they didn't, they'd be married too.

- Mencken, H. L.

It is impossible to believe that the same God who permitted His own son to die a bachelor regards celibacy as an actual sin.

- Mencken, H. L.

Nothing is so abject and pathetic as a politician who has lost his job, save only a retired stud-horse.

- Mencken, H. L.

The whole aim of practical politics is to keep the populace alarmed [and Hence Clamorous To Be Led To Safety] by an endless series of hobgoblins.

- Mencken, H. L.

A good politician is quite as unthinkable as an honest burglar.

- Mencken, H. L.

The urge to save humanity is almost always only a false face for the urge to rule it.

- Mencken, H. L.

One may no more live in the world without picking up the moral prejudices of the world than one will be able to go to hell without perspiring.

- Mencken, H. L.

What men value in this world is not rights but privileges.

- Mencken, H. L.

For every complex problem there is an answer that is clear, simple, and wrong.

- Mencken, H. L.

The public, with its mob yearning to be instructed, edified and pulled by the nose,

demands certainties; it must be told definitely and a bit raucously that this is true and that is false. But there are no certainties.

- Mencken, H. L.

The truth is, as every one knows, that the great artists of the world are never Puritans, and seldom even ordinarily respectable. No virtuous man -- that is, virtuous in the Y.M.C.A. sense -- has ever painted a picture worth looking at, or written a symphony worth hearing, or a book worth reading, and it is highly improbable that the thing has ever been done by a virtuous woman.

- Mencken, H. L.

Puritanism: The haunting fear that someone, somewhere, may be happy.

- Mencken, H. L.

Unionism, seldom if ever, uses such powers as it has to ensure better work; almost always it devotes a large part of that power to safeguard bad work.

- Mencken, H. L.

After all, all he did was string together a lot of old, well-known quotations.

- Mencken, H. L.

Remorse is regret that one waited so long to do it.

- Mencken, H. L.

Most people want security in this world, not liberty.

- Mencken, H. L.

School-days, I believe, are the unhappiest in the whole span of human existence. They are full of dull, unintelligible tasks, new and unpleasant ordinances, brutal violations of common sense and common decency. It doesn't take a reasonably bright boy long to discover that most of what is rammed into him is nonsense, and that no one really cares very much whether he learns it or not.

- Mencken, H. L.

Self-respect: the secure feeling that no one, as yet, is suspicious.

- Mencken, H. L.

The fact that I have no remedy for all the sorrows of the world is no reason for my accepting yours. It simply supports the strong probability that yours is a fake.

- Mencken, H. L.

Before a man speaks, it is always safe to assume that he is a fool. After he speaks it is seldom necessary to assume.

- Mencken, H. L.

How little it takes to make life unbearable: a pebble in the shoe, a cockroach in the

spaghetti, a woman's laugh.

- Mencken, H. L.

It is a sin to believe evil of others, but it is seldom a mistake.

- Mencken, H. L.

It is now quite lawful for a Catholic woman to avoid pregnancy by a resort to mathematics, though she is still forbidden to resort to physics and chemistry.

- Mencken, H. L.

The chief knowledge that a man gets from reading books is the knowledge that very few of them are worth reading.

- Mencken, H. L.

There are two kinds of books. Those that no one reads and those that no one ought to read.

- Mencken, H. L.

There are people who read too much: bibliobibuli. I know some who are constantly drunk on books, as other men are drunk on whiskey or religion. They wander through this most diverting and stimulating of worlds in a haze, seeing nothing and hearing nothing.

- Mencken, H. L.

It is the dull man who is always sure, and the sure man who is always dull.

- Mencken, H. L.

Unquestionably, there is progress. The average American now pays twice as much in taxes as he formerly got in wages.

- Mencken, H. L.

The truth is that the average schoolmaster, on all the lower levels, is and always must be essentially and next door to an idiot, for how can one imagine an intelligent man engaging in so puerile an avocation?

- Mencken, H. L.

Temptation is a woman's weapon and man's excuse.

- Mencken, H. L.

Theology is the effort to explain the unknowable in terms of the not worth knowing.

- Mencken, H. L.

Time stays, we go.

- Mencken, H. L.

If women believed in their husbands they would be a good deal happier and also a good deal more foolish.

- Mencken, H. L.

It is hard to believe that a man is telling the truth when you know that you would lie if you were in his place.

- Mencken, H. L.

I believe that it is better to tell the truth than a lie. I believe it is better to be free than to be a slave. And I believe it is better to know than to be ignorant.

- Mencken, H. L.

Giving every man a vote has no more made men wise and free than Christianity has made them good.

- Mencken, H. L.

War will never cease until babies begin to come into the world with larger cerebrums and smaller adrenal glands.

- Mencken, H. L.

No matter how long he lives, no man ever becomes as wise as the average woman of forty-eight.

- Mencken, H. L.

I write in order to attain that feeling of tension relieved and function achieved which a cow

enjoys on giving milk.

- Mencken, H. L.

I go on working for the same reason that a hen goes on laying eggs.

- Mencken, H. L.

Adultery is the application of democracy to love.

- Mencken, H. L.

Life is a constant oscillation between the sharp horns of dilemmas.

- Mencken, H. L.

Archbishop -- A Christian ecclesiastic of a rank superior to that attained by Christ.

- Mencken, H. L.

A church is a place in which gentlemen who have never been to heaven brag about it to persons who will never get there.

- Mencken, H. L.

The movies today are too rich to have any room for genuine artists. They produce a few passable craftsmen, but no artists. Can you imagine a Beethoven making \$100, 000 a year?

- Mencken, H. L.

Let's not burn the universities yet. After all, the damage they do might be worse.

- Mencken, H. L.

Conscience is a mother-in-law whose visit never ends.

- Mencken, H. L.

Conscience is the inner voice which warns us that someone may be looking.

- Mencken, H. L.

To sum up: 1. The cosmos is a gigantic fly-wheel making 10, 000 revolutions a minute. 2. Man is a sick fly taking a dizzy ride on it. 3. Religion is the theory that the wheel was designed and set spinning to give him the ride.

- Mencken, H. L.

The common argument that crime is caused by poverty is a kind of slander on the poor.

- Mencken, H. L.

It is impossible to think of a man of any actual force and originality, universally recognized as having those qualities, who spent his whole life appraising and describing the work of other men.

- Mencken, H. L.

Criticism is prejudice made plausible.

- Mencken, H. L.

A cynic is a man who, when he smells flowers, looks around for a coffin.

- Mencken, H. L.

The cynics are right nine times out of ten.

- Mencken, H. L.



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