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Quotes by Thoreau, Henry David

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Henry David Thoreau (July 12, 1817 - 1862) was an American essayist, poet, and naturalist. Among his lasting contributions were his writings on natural history and philosophy, where he anticipated the methods and findings of ecology and environmental history, two sources of modern day environmentalism.

I have lived some thirty-odd years on this planet, and I have yet to hear the first syllable of valuable or even earnest advice from my seniors.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Aim above morality. Be not simply good, be good for something.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Live your life, do your work, then take your hat.

- Thoreau, Henry David

As for doing good; that is one of the professions which is full. Moreover I have tried it fairly and, strange as it may seem, am satisfied that it does not agree with my constitution.

- Thoreau, Henry David

If I knew for a certainty that a man was coming to my house with the conscious design of doing me good, I should run for my life.

- Thoreau, Henry David

If a man constantly aspires is he not elevated?

- Thoreau, Henry David

The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation.

- Thoreau, Henry David

I put a piece of paper under my pillow, and when I could not sleep I wrote in the dark.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Is not disease the rule of existence? There is not a lily pad floating on the river but has been riddled by insects. Almost every shrub and tree has its gall, oftentimes esteemed its chief ornament and hardly to be distinguished from the fruit. If misery loves company, misery has company enough. Now, at midsummer, find me a perfect leaf or fruit.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Distrust any enterprise that requires new clothes.

- Thoreau, Henry David

There is no rule more invariable than that we are paid for our suspicions by finding what

we suspect.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Faith keeps many doubts in her pay. If I could not doubt, I should not believe.

- Thoreau, Henry David

If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them.

- Thoreau, Henry David

If one advances confidently in the directions of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Our truest life is when we are in our dreams awake.

- Thoreau, Henry David

For many years I was a self-appointed inspector of snowstorms and rainstorms and did my duty faithfully, though I never received payment for it.

- Thoreau, Henry David

You must not blame me if I do talk to the clouds.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Whether the flower looks better in the nosegay than in the meadow where it grew and we had to wet our feet to get it! Is the scholastic air any advantage?

- Thoreau, Henry David

How could youths better learn to live than by at once trying the experiment of living?

- Thoreau, Henry David

What does education often do? It makes a straight-cut ditch of a free, meandering brook.

- Thoreau, Henry David

I should not talk so much about myself if there were anybody else whom I knew as well.

- Thoreau, Henry David

The heart is forever inexperienced.

- Thoreau, Henry David

The light which puts out our eyes is darkness to us. Only that day dawns to which we are awake. There is more day to dawn. The sun is but a morning star.

- Thoreau, Henry David

In eternity there is indeed something true and sublime. But all these times and places and occasions are now and here. God himself culminates in the present moment and will

never be more divine in the lapse of the ages. Time is but a stream I go a-fishing in. I drink at it, but when I drink I see the sandy bottom and detect how shallow it is. Its thin current slides away but eternity remains.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Being is the great explainer.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Experience is in the fingers and head. The heart is inexperienced.

- Thoreau, Henry David

It is easier to sail many thousand miles through cold and storm and cannibals, in a government ship, with five hundred men and boys to assist one, than it is to explore the private sea, the Atlantic and Pacific Ocean of one's being alone. It is not worth the while to go round the world to count the cats in Zanzibar.

- Thoreau, Henry David

The eye is the jewel of the body.

- Thoreau, Henry David

My facts shall be falsehoods to the common sense. I would so state facts that they shall be significant, shall be myths or mythologies. Facts which the mind perceived, thoughts which the body thought -- with these I deal.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Men are born to succeed, not to fail.

- Thoreau, Henry David

We must have infinite faith in each other. If we have not, we must never let it leak out that we have not.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Through want of enterprise and faith men are where they are, buying and selling and spending their lives like servants.

- Thoreau, Henry David

The words which express our faith and piety are not definite; yet they are significant and fragrant like frankincense to superior natures.

- Thoreau, Henry David

The smallest seed of faith is better than the largest fruit of happiness.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Even the best things are not equal to their fame.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Farmers are respectable and interesting to me in proportion as they are poor.

- Thoreau, Henry David

By avarice and selfishness, and a groveling habit, from which none of us is free, of regarding the soil as property, or the means of acquiring property chiefly, the landscape is deformed, husbandry is degraded with us, and the farmer leads the meanest of lives. He knows Nature but as a robber.

- Thoreau, Henry David

We worship not the Graces, nor the Parcae, but Fashion. She spins and weaves and cuts with full authority. The head monkey at Paris puts on a traveler's cap, and all the monkeys in America do the same.

- Thoreau, Henry David

People die of fright and live of confidence.

- Thoreau, Henry David

The perch swallows the grub-worm, the pickerel swallows the perch, and the fisherman swallows the pickerel; and so all the chinks in the scale of being are filled.

- Thoreau, Henry David

One of the most attractive things about the flowers is their beautiful reserve.

- Thoreau, Henry David

I have found it to be the most serious objection to coarse labors long continued, that they compelled me to eat and drink coarsely also.

- Thoreau, Henry David

The law will never make men free, it is men that have to make the law free.

- Thoreau, Henry David

A friend is one who incessantly pays us the compliment of expecting from us all the virtues, and who can appreciate them in us. The friend asks no return but that his friend will religiously accept and wear and not disgrace his apotheosis of him. They cherish each other's hopes. They are kind to each other's dreams.

- Thoreau, Henry David

We have not so good a right to hate any as our Friend.

- Thoreau, Henry David

A man cannot be said to succeed in this life who does not satisfy one friend.

- Thoreau, Henry David

One may discover a new side to his most intimate friend when for the first time he hears him speak in public. He will be stranger to him as he is more familiar to the audience. The longest intimacy could not foretell how he would behave then

- Thoreau, Henry David

The language of friendship is not words but meanings.

- Thoreau, Henry David

The most I can do for my friend is simply be his friend.

- Thoreau, Henry David

To say that a man is your Friend, means commonly no more than this, that he is not your enemy. Most contemplate only what would be the accidental and trifling advantages of Friendship, as that the Friend can assist in time of need by his substance, or his influence, or his counsel. Even the utmost goodwill and harmony and practical kindness are not sufficient for Friendship, for Friends do not live in harmony merely, as some say, but in melody.

- Thoreau, Henry David

True friendship can afford true knowledge. It does not depend on darkness and ignorance.

- Thoreau, Henry David

I suppose you think that persons who are as old as your father and myself are always thinking about very grave things, but I know that we are meditating the same old themes that we did when we were ten years old, only we go more gravely about it.

- Thoreau, Henry David

As for the pyramids, there is nothing to wonder at in them so much as the fact that so many men could be found degraded enough to spend their lives constructing a tomb for some ambitious booby, whom it would have been wiser and manlier to have drowned in the Nile, and then given his body to the dogs.

- Thoreau, Henry David

The youth gets together his materials to build a bridge to the moon, or, perchance, a palace or temple on the earth, and, at length, the middle-aged man concludes to build a woodshed with them.

- Thoreau, Henry David

None are so old as those who have outlived enthusiasm

- Thoreau, Henry David

How earthy old people become --moldy as the grave! Their wisdom smacks of the earth. There is no foretaste of immortality in it. They remind me of earthworms and mole crickets.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Water is the only drink for a wise man.

- Thoreau, Henry David

In the long run you hit only what you aim at. Therefore, though you should fail immediately, you had better aim at something high.

- Thoreau, Henry David

It seems to me that the god that is commonly worshipped in civilized countries is not at all divine, though he bears a divine name, but is the overwhelming authority and respectability of mankind combined. Men reverence one another, not yet God.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Goodness is the only investment which never fails.

- Thoreau, Henry David

The government of the world I live in was not framed, like that of Britain, in after-dinner conversations over the wine.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Government is at best but an expedient; but most governments are usually, and all governments are sometimes, inexpedient. The objections which have been brought against a standing army, and they are many and weighty, and deserve to prevail, may also at last be brought against a standing government.

- Thoreau, Henry David

That government is best which governs least.

- Thoreau, Henry David

This American government -- what is it but a tradition, though a recent one, endeavoring to transmit itself unimpaired to posterity, but each instant losing some of its integrity? It has not the vitality and force of a single living man; for a single man can bend it to his will.

- Thoreau, Henry David

When I hear the hypercritical quarreling about grammar and style, the position of the particles, etc., etc., stretching or contracting every speaker to certain rules of theirs. I see that they forget that the first requisite and rule is that expression shall be vital and natural, as much as the voice of a brute or an interjection: first of all, mother tongue; and last of all, artificial or father tongue. Essentially your truest poetic sentence is as free and lawless as a lamb's bleat.

- Thoreau, Henry David

He who distinguishes the true savor of his food can never be a glutton; he who does not cannot be otherwise.

- Thoreau, Henry David

What right have I to grieve, who have not ceased to wonder?

- Thoreau, Henry David

Man is the artificer of his own happiness.

- Thoreau, Henry David

We are made happy when reason can discover no occasion for it. The memory of some past moments is more persuasive than the experience of present ones. There have been visions of such breadth and brightness that these motes were invisible in their light.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Measure your health by your sympathy with morning and spring. If there is no response in you to the awakening of nature --if the prospect of an early morning walk does not banish sleep, if the warble of the first bluebird does not thrill you --know that the morning and spring of your life are past. Thus may you feel your pulse.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Must be out-of-doors enough to get experience of wholesome reality, as a ballast to thought and sentiment. Health requires this relaxation, this aimless life.

- Thoreau, Henry David

We should come home from adventures, and perils, and discoveries every day with new experience and character.

- Thoreau, Henry David

I had three chairs in my house; one for solitude, two for friendship, three for society.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Should not every apartment in which man dwells be lofty enough to create some obscurity overhead, where flickering shadows may play at evening about the rafters?

- Thoreau, Henry David

Be true to your work, your word, and your friend.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Nowadays the host does not admit you to his hearth, but has got the mason to build one for yourself somewhere in his alley, and hospitality is the art of keeping you at the greatest distance.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Humility like the darkness, reveals the heavenly lights.

- Thoreau, Henry David

To have done anything just for money is to have been truly idle.

- Thoreau, Henry David

I do not know how to distinguish between our waking life and a dream. Are we not always living the life that we imagine we are?

- Thoreau, Henry David

It is usually the imagination that is wounded first, rather than the heart; it being much more

sensitive.

- Thoreau, Henry David

The man who goes alone can start today; but he who travels with another must wait till that other is ready, and it may be a long time before they get off.

- Thoreau, Henry David

We perceive and are affected by changes too subtle to be described.

- Thoreau, Henry David

To inherit property is not to be born -- it is to be still-born, rather.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Write while the heat is in you. The writer who postpones the recording of his thoughts uses an iron which has cooled to burn a hole with. He cannot inflame the minds of his audience.

- Thoreau, Henry David

What is peculiar in the life of a man consists not in his obedience, but his opposition, to his instincts. In one direction or another he strives to live a supernatural life.

- Thoreau, Henry David

The way in which men cling to old institutions after the life has departed out of them, and

out of themselves, reminds me of those monkeys which cling by their tails -- aye, whose tails contract about the limbs, even the dead limbs, of the forest, and they hang suspended beyond the hunter's reach long after they are dead. It is of no use to argue with such men. They have not an apprehensive intellect, but merely, as it were a prehensile tail.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Wherever a man goes, men will pursue him and paw him with their dirty institutions, and, if they can, constrain him to belong to their desperate odd-fellow society.

- Thoreau, Henry David

The laboring man has not leisure for a true integrity day by day.

- Thoreau, Henry David

We need only travel enough to give our intellects an airing.

- Thoreau, Henry David

We hate the kindness which we understand.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Knowledge does not come to us in details, but in flashes of light from heaven.

- Thoreau, Henry David

The knowledge of an unlearned man is living and luxuriant like a forest, but covered with mosses and lichens and for the most part inaccessible and going to waste; the knowledge of the man of science is like timber collected in yards for public works, which still supports a green sprout here and there, but even this is liable to dry rot.

- Thoreau, Henry David

To know that we know what we know, and that we do not know what we do not know, that is true knowledge.

- Thoreau, Henry David

We are armed with language adequate to describe each leaf of the forest, but not to describe human character.

- Thoreau, Henry David

It is not desirable to cultivate a respect for law, so much as a respect for right.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Whatever the human law may be, neither an individual nor a nation can commit the least act of injustice against the obscurest individual without having to pay the penalty for it.

- Thoreau, Henry David

The lawyer's truth is not Truth, but consistency or a consistent expediency.

- Thoreau, Henry David

I say, break the law.

- Thoreau, Henry David

He enjoys true leisure who has time to improve his soul's estate.

- Thoreau, Henry David

A broad margin of leisure is as beautiful in a man's life as in a book. Haste makes waste, no less in life than in housekeeping. Keep the time, observe the hours of the universe, not of the cars. What are threescore years and ten hurriedly and coarsely lived to moments of divine leisure in which your life is coincident with the life of the universe?

- Thoreau, Henry David

I have received no more than one or two letters in my life that were worth the postage.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Disobedience is the true foundation of liberty. The obedient must be slaves.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Most men lead lives of quiet desperation and go to the grave with the song still in them.

- Thoreau, Henry David

If I shall sell both my forenoons and afternoons to society, as most appear to do, I'm sure

that, for me, there would be nothing left worth living for.

- Thoreau, Henry David

I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life... I wanted to live so sturdily and so Spartan-like as to put to rout all that was not life... to drive life into a corner to know it by experience and be able to give an account of it in my next excursion.

- Thoreau, Henry David

However mean your life is, meet it and live it; do not shun it and call it hard names. It is not so bad as you are. It looks poorest when you are the richest.

- Thoreau, Henry David

The man who is dissatisfied with himself, what can he do?

- Thoreau, Henry David

What is a country without rabbits and partridges? They are among the most simple and indigenous animal products; ancient and venerable families known to antiquity as to modern times; of the very hue and substance of Nature, nearest allied to leaves and to the ground.

- Thoreau, Henry David

The keeping of bees is like the direction of sunbeams.

- Thoreau, Henry David

True, there are architects so called in this country, and I have heard of one at least possessed with the idea of making architectural ornaments have a core of truth, a necessity, and hence a beauty, as if it were a revelation to him. All very well perhaps from his point of view, but only a little better than the common dilettantism.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Visit the Navy-Yard, and behold a marine, such a man as an American government can make, or such as it can make a man with its black arts -- a mere shadow and reminiscence of humanity, a man laid out alive and standing, and already, as one may say, buried under arms with funeral accompaniments.

- Thoreau, Henry David

There is no remedy for love than to love more.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Love must be as much a light, as it is a flame.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Most of the luxuries and many of the so-called comforts of life are not only not indispensable, but positive hindrances to the elevation of mankind.

- Thoreau, Henry David

The mass never comes up to the standard of its best member, but on the contrary degrades itself to a level with the lowest.

- Thoreau, Henry David

In the midst of this chopping sea of civilized life, such are the clouds and storms and quicksands and thousand-and-one items to be allowed for, that a man has to live, if he would not founder and go to the bottom and not make his port at all, by dead reckoning, and he must be a great calculator indeed who succeeds.

- Thoreau, Henry David

We are eager to tunnel under the Atlantic and bring the Old World some weeks nearer to the New; but perchance the first news that will leak through into the broad, flapping American ear will be that the Princess Adelaide has the whooping cough.

- Thoreau, Henry David

The boy gathers materials for a temple, and then when he is thirty, concludes to build a woodshed.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Our moments of inspiration are not lost though we have no particular poem to show for them; for those experiences have left an indelible impression, and we are ever and anon reminded of them.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Of what significance are the things you can forget.

- Thoreau, Henry David

A minority is powerless while it conforms to the majority; it is not even a minority then; but it is irresistible when it clogs by its whole weight.

- Thoreau, Henry David

The broadest and most prevalent error requires the most disinterested virtue to sustain it.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Almost any man knows how to earn money, but not one in a million knows how to spend it.

- Thoreau, Henry David

The way by which you may get money almost without exception leads downward.

- Thoreau, Henry David

The only wealth is life.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Money is not required to buy one necessity of the soul.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Our whole life is startlingly moral. There is never an instant's truce between virtue and vice.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Don't be too moral. You may cheat yourself out of much life so.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Do not be too moral. You may cheat yourself out of much life. So aim above morality. Be not simply good; be good for something.

- Thoreau, Henry David

The pleasure we feel in music springs from the obedience which is in it.

- Thoreau, Henry David

At the same time that we are earnest to explore and learn all things, we require that all things be mysterious and unexplorable, that land and sea be infinitely wild, unsurveyed and unfathomed by us because unfathomable.

- Thoreau, Henry David

If the fairest features of the landscape are to be named after men, let them be the noblest and worthiest men alone.

- Thoreau, Henry David

A name pronounced is the recognition of the individual to whom it belongs. He who can pronounce my name aright, he can call me, and is entitled to my love and service.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Nations! What are nations? Tartars! and Huns! and Chinamen! Like insects they swarm. The historian strives in vain to make them memorable. It is for want of a man that there are so many men. It is individuals that populate the world.

- Thoreau, Henry David

We can never have enough of nature. We must be refreshed by the sight of inexhaustible vigor, vast and titanic features, the sea-coast with its wrecks, the wilderness with its living and its decaying trees, the thunder-cloud, and the rain which lasts three weeks and produces freshets. We need to witness our own limits transgressed, and some life pasturing freely where we never wander.

- Thoreau, Henry David

To a philosopher all news, as it is called, is gossip, and they who edit it and read it are old women over their tea.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Do what you love. Know you own bone; gnaw at it, bury it, unearth it, and gnaw it still.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Yet some can be patriotic who have no self-respect, and sacrifice the greater to the less. They love the soil which makes their graves, but have no sympathy with the spirit which may still animate their clay. Patriotism is a maggot in their heads.

- Thoreau, Henry David

You know about a person who deeply interests you more than you can be told. A look, a gesture, an act, which to everybody else is insignificant tells you more about that one than words can.

- Thoreau, Henry David

What sort of philosophers are we, who know absolutely nothing about the origin and destiny of cats?

- Thoreau, Henry David

To be a philosopher is not merely to have subtle thoughts, nor even to found a school, but so to love wisdom as to live according to its dictates a life of simplicity, independence, magnanimity, and trust. It is to solve some of the problems of life, not only theoretically, but practically.

- Thoreau, Henry David

A stereotyped but unconscious despair is concealed even under what are called the games and amusements of mankind.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Poetry implies the whole truth, philosophy expresses only a particle of it.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Good poetry seems too simple and natural a thing that when we meet it we wonder that all men are not always poets. Poetry is nothing but healthy speech.

- Thoreau, Henry David

After all the field of battle possesses many advantages over the drawing-room. There at least is no room for pretension or excessive ceremony, no shaking of hands or rubbing of noses, which make one doubt your sincerity, but hearty as well as hard hand-play. It at least exhibits one of the faces of humanity, the former only a mask.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Politics is the gizzard of society, full of gut and gravel.

- Thoreau, Henry David

We are not what we are, nor do we treat or esteem each other for such, but for what we are capable of being.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Give me the poverty that enjoys true wealth.

- Thoreau, Henry David

You must live in the present, launch yourself on every wave, find your eternity in each moment.

- Thoreau, Henry David

I would not talk so much about myself if there were anybody else whom I knew as well.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Under a government which imprisons any unjustly, the true place for a just man is also a prison.

- Thoreau, Henry David

There are thousands hacking at the branches of evil to one who is striking at the root.

- Thoreau, Henry David

I respect not his labors, his farm where everything has its price, who would carry the landscape, who would carry his God, to market, if he could get anything for him; who goes to market for his god as it is; on whose farm nothing grows free, whose fields bear no crops, whose meadows no flowers, whose trees no fruits, but dollars.

- Thoreau, Henry David

When any real progress is made, we unlearn and learn anew what we thought we knew before.

- Thoreau, Henry David

The highest law gives a thing to him who can use it.

- Thoreau, Henry David

I quietly declare war with the State, after my fashion, though I will still make use and get advantage of her as I can, as is usual in such cases.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Public opinion is a weak tyrant compared with our own private opinion. What a man thinks of himself, that it is which determines, or rather indicates, his fate.

- Thoreau, Henry David

The purity men love is like the mists which envelope the earth, and not like the azure ether beyond.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Many men go fishing their entire lives without knowing it is not fish they are after.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Be not simply good; be good for something.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Why should we be in such desperate haste to succeed, and in such desperate enterprises? If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured and far away. It is not important that he should mature as soon as an apple tree or an oak.

- Thoreau, Henry David

To watch this crystal globe just sent from heaven to associate with me. While these clouds and this somber drizzling weather shut all in, we two draw nearer and know one another. The gathering in of the clouds with the last rush and dying breath of the wind, and then the regular dripping of twigs and leaves the country over, the impression of inward comfort and Sociableness, the drenched stubble and trees that drop beads on you as you pass, their dim outline seen through the rain on all sides drooping in sympathy with yourself. These are my undisputed territory. This is Nature's English comfort.

- Thoreau, Henry David

It is an interesting question how far men would retain their relative rank if they were divested of their clothes.

- Thoreau, Henry David

The greater part of what my neighbors call good I believe in my soul to be bad, and if I repent of anything, it is very likely to be my good behavior. What demon possessed me that I behaved so well? You may say the wisest thing you can, old man, -- you who have lived seventy years, not without honor of a kind, -- I hear an irresistible voice which invites me away from all that.

- Thoreau, Henry David

I believe that what so saddens the reformer is not his sympathy with his fellows in distress, but, though he be the holiest son of God, is his private ail. Let this be righted, let the spring come to him, the morning rise over his couch, and he will forsake his generous companions without apology.

- Thoreau, Henry David

To regret deeply is to live afresh.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Make the most of your regrets; never smother your sorrow, but tend and cherish it till it come to have a separate and integral interest. To regret deeply is to live afresh.

- Thoreau, Henry David

What is called resignation is confirmed desperation.

- Thoreau, Henry David

We live thick and are in each other's way, and stumble over one another, and I think we thus lose some respect for one another.

- Thoreau, Henry David

That man is richest whose pleasures are the cheapest.

- Thoreau, Henry David

The rich man is always sold to the institution which makes him rich. Absolutely speaking, the more money, the less virtue.

- Thoreau, Henry David

A man sits as many risks as he runs.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Any fool can make a rule, and every fool will mind it.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Absolutely speaking, Do unto others as you would that they should do unto you is by no means a golden rule, but the best of current silver. An honest man would have but little occasion for it. It is golden not to have any rule at all in such a case.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Our manners have been corrupted by communication with the saints.

- Thoreau, Henry David

The success of great scholars and thinkers is commonly a courtier-like success, not kingly, not manly.

- Thoreau, Henry David

If we knew all the laws of Nature, we should need only one fact, or the description of one actual phenomenon, to infer all the particular results at that point. Now we know only a few laws, and our result is vitiated, not, of course, by any confusion or irregularity in Nature, but by our ignorance of essential elements in the calculation. Our notions of law and harmony are commonly confined to those instances which we detect; but the harmony which results from a far greater number of seemingly conflicting, but really concurring, laws, which we have not detected, is still more wonderful. The particular laws are as our points of view, as, to the traveler, a mountain outline varies with every step, and it has an infinite number of profiles, though absolutely but one form. Even when cleft or bored through it is not comprehended in its entirety.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Live in each season as it passes; breathe the air, drink the drink, taste the fruit, and resign yourself to the influences of each. Let them be your only diet drink and botanical medicines.

- Thoreau, Henry David

We are constantly invited to be who we are.

- Thoreau, Henry David

I fear chiefly lest my expression may not be extravagant enough, may not wander far enough beyond the narrow limit of my daily experience, so as to be adequate to the truth of which I have been convinced. Extravagance! it depends on how you are yarded.

- Thoreau, Henry David

To affect the quality of the day, that is the highest of arts. Every man is tasked to make his life, even in its details, worthy of the contemplation of his most elevated and critical hour.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Explore thyself. Herein are demanded the eye and the nerve.

- Thoreau, Henry David

I know myself as a human entity; the scene, so to speak, or thoughts are affection; and am sensible of certain doubleness by which I can stand as remote from myself as from another. However intense my experience, I am conscious of the presence and criticism of a part of me, which, as it were, is no part of me, but spectator, sharing no experience, but taking note of it, and that is no more I than it is you.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Nay, be a Columbus to whole new continents and worlds within you, opening new channels, not of trade, but of thought. Every man is the lord of a realm beside which the earthly empire of the Czar is but a petty state, a hummock left by the ice.

- Thoreau, Henry David

The finest qualities of our nature, like the bloom on fruits, can be preserved only by the most delicate handling. Yet we do not treat ourselves nor one another thus tenderly.

- Thoreau, Henry David

I have been breaking silence these twenty-three years and have hardly made a rent in it.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Silence is the universal refuge, the sequel to all dull discourses and all foolish acts, a balm to our every chagrin, as welcome after satiety as after disappointment; that background which the painter may not daub, be he master or bungler, and which, however awkward a figure we may have made in the foreground, remains ever our inviolable asylum, where no indignity can assail, no personality can disturb us.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Our life is frittered away by detail. Simplify, simplify, simplify! I say, let your affairs be as two or three, and not a hundred or a thousand; instead of a million count half a dozen, and keep your accounts on your thumb-nail.

- Thoreau, Henry David

We cannot well do without our sins; they are the highway of our virtue.

- Thoreau, Henry David

After the first blush of sin comes its indifference.

- Thoreau, Henry David

I sat at a table where were rich food and wine in abundance, and obsequious attendance,

but sincerity and truth were not; and I went away hungry from the inhospitable board.

- Thoreau, Henry David

I only desire sincere relations with the worthiest of my acquaintance, that they may give me an opportunity once in a year to speak the truth.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Talk about slavery! It is not the peculiar institution of the South. It exists wherever men are bought and sold, wherever a man allows himself to be made a mere thing or a tool, and surrenders his inalienable rights of reason and conscience. Indeed, this slavery is more complete than that which enslaves the body alone... I never yet met with, or heard of, a judge who was not a slave of this kind, and so the finest and most unfailing weapon of injustice. He fetches a slightly higher price than the black men only because he is a more valuable slave.

- Thoreau, Henry David

What men call social virtues, good fellowship, is commonly but the virtue of pigs in a litter, which lie close together to keep each other warm.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Sobriety, severity, and self-respect are the foundations of all true sociality.

- Thoreau, Henry David

I find it wholesome to be alone the greater part of time. To be in company, even with the

best, is soon wearisome and dissipating. I love to be alone, I never found the companionable as solitude.

- Thoreau, Henry David

I have never found a companion so companionable as solitude.

- Thoreau, Henry David

I would rather sit on a pumpkin, and have it all to myself, than be crowded on a velvet cushion.

- Thoreau, Henry David

If we will be quiet and ready enough, we shall find compensation in every disappointment.

- Thoreau, Henry David

However intense my experience, I am conscious of the presence and criticism of a part of me, which, as it were, is not a part of me, but a spectator, sharing no experience, but taking note of it, and that is no more I than it is you. When the play, it may be the tragedy, of life is over, the spectator goes his way. It was a kind of fiction, a work of the imagination only, so far as he was concerned.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Speech is for the convenience of those who are hard of hearing; but there are many fine things which we cannot say if we have to shout.

- Thoreau, Henry David

The stars are the apexes of what triangles!

- Thoreau, Henry David

There will never be a really free and enlightened State until the State comes to recognize the individual as a higher and independent power, from which all its own power and authority are derived, and treats him accordingly. I please myself with imagining a State at last which can afford to be just to all men, and to treat the individual with respect as a neighbor; which even would not think it inconsistent with its own repose if a few went to live aloof from it, not meddling with it, nor embraced by it, who fulfilled all the duties of neighbors and fellow-men. A State which bore this kind of fruit, and suffered it to drop off as fast as it ripened, would prepare the way for a still more perfect and glorious State, which also I have imagined, but not yet anywhere seen.

- Thoreau, Henry David

You must get your living by loving, or at least half your life is a failure.

- Thoreau, Henry David

We were born to succeed, not to fail.

- Thoreau, Henry David

We must walk consciously only part way toward our goal, and then leap in the dark to our success.

- Thoreau, Henry David

He is the best sailor who can steer within fewest points of the wind, and exact a motive power out of the greatest obstacles.

- Thoreau, Henry David

I know of no more encouraging fact than the unquestionable ability of man to elevate his life by conscious endeavor.

- Thoreau, Henry David

If I repent of anything, it is very likely to be my good behavior.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Behave so the aroma of your actions may enhance the general sweetness of the atmosphere.

- Thoreau, Henry David

We feel at first as if some opportunities of kindness and sympathy were lost, but learn afterward that any pure grief is ample recompense for all. That is, if we are faithful; -- for a spent grief is but sympathy with the soul that disposes events, and is as natural as the resin of Arabian trees. -- Only nature has a right to grieve perpetually, for she only is innocent. Soon the ice will melt, and the blackbirds sing along the river which he frequented, as pleasantly as ever. The same everlasting serenity will appear in this face of God, and we will not be sorrowful, if he is not.

- Thoreau, Henry David

On the death of a friend, we should consider that the fates through confidence have devolved on us the task of a double living, that we have henceforth to fulfill the promise of our friend's life also, in our own, to the world.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Every man is the builder of a temple, called his body, to the god he worships, after a style purely his own, nor can he get off by hammering marble instead. We are all sculptors and painters, and our material is our own flesh and blood and bones.

- Thoreau, Henry David

For what are the classics but the noblest thoughts of man? They are the only oracles which are not decayed, and there are such answers to the most modern inquiry in them as Delphi and Dodona never gave. We might as well omit to study Nature because she is old.

- Thoreau, Henry David

To read well, that is, to read true books in a true spirit, is a noble exercise, and one that will task the reader more than any other exercise which the customs of the day esteem. It requires a training such as the athletes underwent, the steady intention almost of the whole life to this object.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Read the best books first, or you may not have a chance to read them at all.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Books must be read as deliberately and reservedly as they were written.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Books, not which afford us a cowering enjoyment, but in which each thought is of unusual daring; such as an idle man cannot read, and a timid one would not be entertained by, which even make us dangerous to existing institution --such call I good books.

- Thoreau, Henry David

How many a man has dated a new era in his life from the reading of a book! The book exists for us, perchance, that will explain our miracles and reveal new ones. The at present unutterable things we may find somewhere uttered.

- Thoreau, Henry David

If I seem to boast more than is becoming, my excuse is that I brag for humanity rather than for myself.

- Thoreau, Henry David

It is not enough to be busy. So are the ants. The question is: What are we busy about?

- Thoreau, Henry David

Beware of all enterprises that require a new set of clothes.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Things do not change, we do.

- Thoreau, Henry David

We know but a few men, a great many coats and breeches.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Pity the man who has a character to support --it is worse than a large family -- he is silent poor indeed.

- Thoreau, Henry David

The universe seems bankrupt as soon as we begin to discuss the characters of individuals.

- Thoreau, Henry David

We falsely attribute to men a determined character -- putting together all their yesterdays -- and averaging them -- we presume we know them. Pity the man who has character to support -- it is worse than a large family -- he is the silent poor indeed.

- Thoreau, Henry David

If you give money, spend yourself with it.

- Thoreau, Henry David

The generative energy, which, when we are loose, dissipates and makes us unclean, when we are continent invigorates and inspires us. Chastity is the flowering of man; and what are called Genius, Heroism, Holiness, and the like, are but various fruits which succeed it.

- Thoreau, Henry David

The sun is but a morning star.

- Thoreau, Henry David

We are paid for our suspicions by finding what we suspected.

- Thoreau, Henry David

If a thousand men were not to pay their tax-bills this year, that would not be a violent and bloody measure, as it would be to pay them, and enable the State to commit violence and shed innocent blood. This is, in fact, the definition of a peaceable revolution, if any such is possible.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Our inventions are wont to be pretty toys, which distract our attention from serious things. They are but improved means to an unimproved end.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Glances of true beauty can be seen in the faces of those who live in true meekness.

- Thoreau, Henry David

A man thinks as well through his legs and arms as this brain.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Thought is the sculptor who can create the person you want to be.

- Thoreau, Henry David

To him whose elastic and vigorous thought keeps pace with the sun, the day is a perpetual morning.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Associate reverently, as much as you can, with your loftiest thoughts.

- Thoreau, Henry David

How can they expect a harvest of thought who have not had the seed time of character.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Each thought that is welcomed and recorded is a nest egg by the side of which more will be laid.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Having each some shingles of thought well dried, we sat and whittled them.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Time is but the stream I go fishing in. I drink at it, but while I drink I see the sandy bottom and detect how shallow it is. Its thin current slides away, but eternity remains.

- Thoreau, Henry David

As if you could kill time without injuring eternity.

- Thoreau, Henry David

You cannot kill time without injuring eternity.

- Thoreau, Henry David

But lo! men have become the tools of their tools.

- Thoreau, Henry David

That devilish Iron Horse, whose ear-rending neigh is heard throughout the town, has muddied the Boiling Spring with his foot, and he it is that has browsed off all the woods on Walden shore, that Trojan horse, with a thousand men in his belly, introduced by mercenary Greeks! Where is the country's champion, the Moore of Moore Hall, to meet him at the Deep Cut and thrust an avenging lance between the ribs of the bloated pest?

- Thoreau, Henry David

He who is only a traveler learns things at second-hand and by the halves, and is poor authority. We are most interested when science reports what those men already know practically or instinctively, for that alone is a true humanity, or account of human experience.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Only the traveling is good which reveals to me the value of home and enables me to enjoy it better.

- Thoreau, Henry David

I think that we may safely trust a good deal more than we do. We may waive just so much care of ourselves as we honestly bestow elsewhere.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Between whom there is hearty truth, there is love.

- Thoreau, Henry David

It takes two to speak truth -- one to speak, and another to hear.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Rather than love, than money, than fame, give me truth.

- Thoreau, Henry David

We shall see but little way if we require to understand what we see. How few things can a man measure with the tape of his understanding! How many greater things might he be seeing in the meanwhile!

- Thoreau, Henry David

The universe is wider than our views of it.

- Thoreau, Henry David

One farmer says to me, You cannot live on vegetable food solely, for it furnishes nothing to make bones with; and so he religiously devotes a part of his day to supplying his system with the raw material of bones; walking all the while he talks behind his oxen, which, with vegetable-made bones, jerk him and his lumbering plow along in spite of every obstacle.

- Thoreau, Henry David

I have no doubt that it is a part of the destiny of the human race, in its gradual improvement, to leave off eating animals, as surely as the savage tribes have left off eating each other when they came in contact with the more civilized.

- Thoreau, Henry David

That virtue we appreciate is as much ours as another s. We see so much only as we possess.

- Thoreau, Henry David

There are nine hundred and ninety-nine patrons of virtue to one virtuous man.

- Thoreau, Henry David

I would give all the wealth of the world, and all the deeds of all the heroes, for one true vision.

- Thoreau, Henry David

All voting is a sort of gaming, like checkers or backgammon, with a slight moral tinge to it, a playing with right and wrong.

- Thoreau, Henry David

The savage in man is never quite eradicated.

- Thoreau, Henry David

I have a deep sympathy with war, it so apes the gait and bearing of the soul.

- Thoreau, Henry David

A man is rich in proportion to the number of things he can afford to let alone.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Superfluous wealth can buy superfluities only. Money is not required to buy one necessary of the soul.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Wealth is the ability to fully experience life.

- Thoreau, Henry David

In wildness is the preservation of the world.

- Thoreau, Henry David

We need the tonic of wildness, to wade sometimes in marshes where the bittern and the meadow-hen lurk, and hear the booming of the snipe; to smell the whispering sedge where only some wilder and more solitary fowl builds her nest, and the mink crawls with its belly close to the ground.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Many of the phenomena of Winter are suggestive of an inexpressible tenderness and fragile delicacy. We are accustomed to hear this king described as a rude and boisterous tyrant; but with the gentleness of a lover he adorns the tresses of Summer.

- Thoreau, Henry David

It is characteristic of wisdom not to do desperate things.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Sometimes we are inclined to class those who are once-and-a-half witted with the half-witted, because we appreciate only a third part of their wit.

- Thoreau, Henry David

It requires nothing less than a chivalric feeling to sustain a conversation with a lady.

- Thoreau, Henry David

The volatile truth of our words should continually betray the inadequacy of the residual statement.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Men have become the tools of their trade.

- Thoreau, Henry David

The really efficient laborer will be found not to crowd his day with work, but will saunter to his task surrounded by a wide halo of ease and leisure.

- Thoreau, Henry David

There is no more fatal blunderer than he who consumes the greater part of his life getting his living.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Most men would feel insulted if it were proposed to employ them in throwing stones over a wall, and then in throwing them back, merely that they might earn their wages. But many are no more worthily employed now.

- Thoreau, Henry David

The earth is not a mere fragment of dead history, stratum upon stratum like the leaves of a book, to be studied by geologists and antiquaries chiefly, but living poetry like the leaves of a tree, which precede flowers and fruit -- not a fossil earth, but a living earth; compared with whose great central life all animal and vegetable life is merely parasitic. Its throes will heave our exuviate from their graves.

- Thoreau, Henry David

All good things are cheap: all bad are very dear.

- Thoreau, Henry David

A perfectly healthy sentence, it is true, is extremely rare. For the most part we miss the hue and fragrance of the thought; as if we could be satisfied with the dews of the morning or evening without their colors, or the heavens without their azure.

- Thoreau, Henry David

How vain it is to sit down to write when you have not stood up to live.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Youth gets together with their materials to build a bridge to the moon or maybe a palace on earth; then in middle age they decide to build a woodshed with them instead.

- Thoreau, Henry David

We do not learn by inference and deduction and the application of mathematics to philosophy, but by direct intercourse and sympathy.

- Thoreau, Henry David

I did not wish to take a cabin passage, but rather to go before the mast and on the deck of the world, for there I could best see the moonlight amid the mountains. I do not wish to go below now.

- Thoreau, Henry David

We seem but to linger in manhood to tell the dreams of our childhood, and they vanish out of memory ere we learn the language.

- Thoreau, Henry David

City life is millions of people being lonesome together.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Why level downward to our dullest perception always, and praise that as common sense?

The commonest sense is the sense of men asleep, which they express by snoring.

- Thoreau, Henry David

I have a great deal of company in my house; especially in the morning, when nobody calls.

- Thoreau, Henry David

The greatest compliment that was ever paid me was when one asked what I thought, and attended to my answer.

- Thoreau, Henry David

The fibers of all things have their tension and are strained like the strings of an instrument.

- Thoreau, Henry David

As to conforming outwardly, and living your own life inwardly, I have not a very high opinion of that course.

- Thoreau, Henry David

If we were left solely to the wordy wit of legislators in Congress for our guidance, uncorrected by the seasonal experience and the effectual complaints of the people, America would not long retain her rank among the nations.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Let nothing come between you and the light.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Every generation laughs at the old fashions, but religiously follows the new.

- Thoreau, Henry David

There is no odor so bad as that which arises from goodness tainted.

- Thoreau, Henry David

The cost of a thing is the amount of what I will call life which is required to be exchanged for it, immediately or in the long run.

- Thoreau, Henry David

The Artist is he who detects and applies the law from observation of the works of Genius, whether of man or Nature. The Artisan is he who merely applies the rules which others have detected.

- Thoreau, Henry David

I am sorry to think that you do not get a man's most effective criticism until you provoke him. Severe truth is expressed with some bitterness.

- Thoreau, Henry David

I heartily accept the motto, That government is best which governs least; and I should like to see it acted up to more rapidly and systematically. Carried out, it finally amounts to this, which I also believe, That government is best which governs not at all; and when men are prepared for it, that will be the kind of government which they will have. Government is at best but an expedient; but most governments are usually, and all governments are sometimes, inexpedient.

- Thoreau, Henry David

I must walk toward Oregon, and not toward Europe. And that way the nation is moving, and I may say that mankind progress from east to west. We go eastward to realize history and study the works of art and literature, retracing the steps of the race; we go westward as into the future, with a spirit of enterprise and adventure.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Eastward I go only by force; but westward I go free.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Nothing is so much to be feared as fear.

- Thoreau, Henry David

There are a thousand hacking at the branches of evil to one who is striking at the root, and it may be that he who bestows the largest amount of time and money on the needy is doing the most by his mode of life to produce that misery which he strives in vain to relieve.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Drive a nail home and clinch it so faithfully that you can wake up in the night and think of your work with satisfaction, a work at which you would not be ashamed to invoke the Muse.

- Thoreau, Henry David

I lose my respect for the man who can make the mystery of sex the subject of a coarse jest, yet when you speak earnestly and seriously on the subject, is silent.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Our inventions are wont to be pretty toys, which distract our attention from serious things. They are but improved means to an unimproved end, We are in great haste to construct a magnetic telegraph from Maine to Texas; but Maine and Texas, it may be, have nothing important to communicate.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Every man will be a poet if he can; otherwise a philosopher or man of science. This proves the superiority of the poet.

- Thoreau, Henry David

The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation. What is called resignation is confirmed desperation. From the desperate city you go into the desperate country, and have to console yourself with the bravery of minks and muskrats. A stereotyped but unconscious despair is concealed even under what are called the games and amusements of mankind. There is no play in them, for this comes after work. But it is a characteristic of wisdom not to do desperate things.

- Thoreau, Henry David

If a man is alive, there is always danger that he may die, though the danger must be

allowed to be less in proportion as he is dead-and-alive to begin with. A man sits as many risks as he runs.

- Thoreau, Henry David

If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away.

- Thoreau, Henry David

Every blade in the field -

Every leaf in the forest -

lays down its life in its season

as beautifully as it was taken up.

- Thoreau, Henry David



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