

A Gorgeous Gallimaufry of Unquenchable Quotations
Gathered from Undisciplined Reading

A constant smirking upon the face, and a whiffling activity of the body, are strong indications of futility. —Lord Chesterfield to his son

Nature is the place where birds fly about uncooked. —Oscar Wilde

Conscience is the inner voice that warns you someone may be watching.
--Mencken

Next to a battle lost, the greatest misery is a battle gained. --Wellington

When all prerogatives of birth and fortune have been abolished when every profession is open to everyone... an ambitious man may think it is easy to launch himself on a great career and feel that he has been called to no common destiny. But this is a delusion which experience quickly corrects. When inequality is the general rule in society, the greatest inequalities attract no attention. But when everything is more or less level, the slightest variation is noticed... That is the reason for the strange melancholy often haunting inhabitants of democracies in the midst of abundance and of that disgust with life sometimes gripping them even in calm and easy circumstances. --Tocqueville, Democracy in America

I have often wondered how it is that every man loves himself more than all the rest of men, but yet sets less value on his own opinion of himself than on the opinion of others. --Marcus Aurelius

I never gave away anything without wishing I had kept it; nor kept it without wishing I had given it away. --Louise Brooks

Le Poète est semblable au prince des nuées,
Qui hante la tempête et se rit de l'archer. --Baudelaire

If God did not intend for us to eat animals, then why did he make them out of meat?
—John Cleese

The final test of fame is to have a crazy person imagine he is you. --Anon

No siren did ever so charm the ear of the listener as the listening ear has charmed the soul of the siren. --Sir Henry Taylor

He who does not enjoy solitude will not love freedom. --Schopenhauer

There is something which has never been seen yet, and which, to all appearances, never will be, and that is a little town which isn't divided into cliques, where the families are united, and the cousins trust each other; where a marriage doesn't start a civil war, and where quarrels about precedence don't arise every time a service, a ceremony, a procession, or a funeral are held; where gossip and lying and malice have been outlawed; where the landlord and the corporation are on speaking terms, or the ratepayers and their assessors; where the dean is friendly with the canons,

and the canons don't despise the chaplains, and the chaplains tolerate the men in the choir.
--La Bruyere

"To establish oneself in the world, one does all one can to seem established there already."
--La Rochefoucauld

"Une verité cruelle, mais dont il faut convenir, c'est que dans le monde, et surtout dans un monde choisi, tout est Art, Science, Calcul, même l'apparence de la simplicité, de la facilité le plus aimable. (..) Il parait impossible que, dans l'état actuel de la société (je parle toujours du grand monde), il y ait un seul homme qui puisse montrer le fond de son âme et les détails de son caractère, et surtout de ses faiblesses, à son meilleur ami. Mais, encore une fois, il faut porter (dans ce monde-là) le raffinement si loin qu'il ne puisse pas être suspect, ne fût-ce que pour ne pas être méprisé comme acteur dans une troupe d'excellents comédiens." --Chamfort

A crowd is not company, and faces are but a gallery, and talk but a tinkling cymbal, where there is no love.
--Bacon

There are many who dare not kill themselves for fear of what a neighbors will say.
--Connolly

Anyone sounds right-wing on a subject he knows something about. --Attributed to Robert Conquest by Clive James, *TLS* Jan 1, 2016, p.4

I hold that there is every variety of natural capacity, from the idiot to Newton and Shakespeare; the mass of mankind, midway between these extremees, being blockheads of different degrees: education leaving them pretty much nearly as it found them, with this single difference, that it gives a fixed direction to their stupidity, a sort of incurable wry-neck to the thing they call understanding. So one nose points always east, another alwyas west, and each is ready toswear that it points due north.
--Peacock

The longing to be primitive is a disease of culture; it is archaism in morals. To be so preoccupied with vitality is a symptom of anemia.
--Santayana

"Forgive us our virtues." That is what we should ask of our neighbors.
--Nietzsche

One can always be kind to people about whom one cares nothing. --Oscar Wilde

Three things we should keep in mind [in conversation]: first, that we speak in the presence of people as vain as ourselves, whose vanity suffers in proportion as ours is satisfied; second, that there are few truths important enough to justify paining and reproviiing others for not knowing them; finally, that any man who monopolizes the conversation is a fool or would be fortunate if he were one. --Montesquieu

Love: that self-love à deux. --Madame de Stael

We are nearer loving those who hate us than those who love us more than we wish.
--La Rochefoucauld

A man does not look behind the door unless he has stood there himself. --Du Bois

Beggars should be abolished. It annoys one to give to them and it annoys one not to give to them. --Nietzsche

Fashion is gentility running away from vulgarity, and afraid of being overtaken. --Hazlitt

Punctuality is the thief of time. --Oscar Wilde

Life at court does not satisfy a man, but it keeps him from being satisfied with anything else. --La Bruyere

Love for life is still possible, only one loves differently: it is like love for a woman whom one does not trust. --Nietzsche, Preface to GS

The only joy in the world is to begin. --Pavese

We feel in one world, we think and name in another. Between the two we can set up a system of references, but we cannot fill the gap. --Proust

Pride does not wish to owe and vanity does not wish to pay. --La Rochefoucauld

To observations which ourselves we make
We grow more fond for the observer's sake. --Pope

Pride, where wit fails, comes in to our defense,
And fills up all the mighty void of sense. --Pope

A man has virtues enough if, on account of them, he deserves forgiveness for his faults. --Lichtenberg

What's left over from the thief is spent on the fortune teller. --Yiddish proverb

Tact consists in knowing how far to go in going too far.--Cocteau

Many would be cowards if they had courage enough. --Thomas Fuller

Nothing is enough to the man for whom enough is too little. --Epicurus

Hope is a good breakfast but it is a bad supper. --Bacon

Perched on the loftiest throne in the world, we are still sitting on our own behind.
--Montaigne

Silence is the unbearable repartee. --Chesterton

Nothing is more characteristic of a man than the manner in which he behaves toward fools. --Amiel

We have just enough religion to make us hate but not enough to make us love one another. --Swift

If you go expressly to look at the moon, it becomes tinsel. --Emerson

Life is the art of drawing sufficient conclusions from insufficient premises.
--Samual Butler (2)

Monkeys are superior to men in this: when a monkey looks into a mirror, he sees a monkey. --Chazal

"Language exists to conceal true thought." --Talleyrand

"Many a true word was spoken through false teeth." --Tiger Ted Ferriter

It is criminal to steal a purse, daring to steal a fortune, and mark of greatness to steal a crown. The blame diminishes as the guilt increases. --Schiller

The newspaper is the second hand in the clock of history; and it is not only made of baser metal than those which point to the minute and the hour, but it seldom goes right. --Schopenhauer

The tyrant dies and his rule is over; the martyr dies and his rule begins.
--Kierkegaard

We understand backward but we live forward. --Kierkegaard

If a thing is worth doing, it is worth doing badly. --Chesterton

If physical science is dangerous, as I have said, it is dangerous because it necessarily ignores the idea of moral evil; but literature is open to the more grievous imputation of recognizing and understanding it too well. --Newman

Art is Nature speeded up and God slowed down. --Chazal

To write simply is as difficult as to be good. --Maugham

The only end of writing is to enable readers better to enjoy it or better to endure it.
--Dr. Johnson

Landscape painting is the obvious resource of misanthropy. --Hazlitt

In painting you must give the idea of the true by means of the false. --Degas

One always has to spoil a picture a little bit, in order to finish it. --Delacroix

Democracy substitutes election by the incompetent many for appointment by the corrupt few. --Shaw

If you ask me, "Why should not the people make their own laws?" I need only ask you, "Why should not the people write their own plays?" They cannot. It is much easier to write a good play than to make a good law. --Shaw

In every man there lies hidden a child between five and eight years old, the age at which *nai:vete'* comes to an end. It is this child whom one must detect in that intimidating man with his long beard, bristling eyebrows, heavy mustache, and weighty look--a captain. Even he conceals, and not at all deep down, the youngster, the booby, the little rascal, out of whom age has made this powerful monster.

--Valéry

The child does not know that men are not only bad from good motives, but also often good from bad motives. Therefore the child has a hearty, healthy, unspoiled, and insatiable appetite for mere morality, for the mere difference between a good little girl and a bad little girl. --Chesterton

Sensuality is the vice of young men and of old nations. --Lecky

The younger we are, the more each individual object represents for us the whole class to which it belongs. --Shaw

Whoever is not a misanthrope at forty can never have loved mankind. --Chamfort

It is the customary fate of new truths to begin as heresies and to end as superstitions. --Huxley

We have to change truth a little to remember it. --Santayana

Truth must necessarily be stranger than fiction; for fiction is the creation of the human mind and therefore congenial to it. --Chesterton

Joyous distrust is a sign of health. Everything absolute belongs to pathology. --Nietzsche

What is patriotism but the love of the good things we ate in our childhood? --Lin Yutang

The [philosophers'] discourses are as the stars, which give little light because they are so high. --Bacon

"The trouble with words is that you never know whose mouth they've been in." --Denis Potter, quoted in Susie Dent, TLS, Jan 30, 2015.

"I saw then that every angle of the palace, every column, every window had a soul that was an enigma... Then I had the strange impression that I was looking at all these things for the first time, and the composition of my picture came to my mind's eye. Above all, a great sensitivity is needed. One must picture everything in the world as an enigma, not only the great questions one has always asked oneself... But rather to understand the enigma of things generally considered insignificant... To live in a world as if in an immense museum of strangeness." --di Chirico (in Nettle, Strong Imagination)

"The tranquil blossom on the tortured stem." --Edna St. Vincent Millay, from "On Hearing a Symphony of Beethoven"

"To find any personality in myself, I have to reread my own letters." --Malcolm Cowley quoted by Marc Robinson, Mar 4, 2014 TLS, p. 9)

"The locomotive, working rapidly with its elbows, hurried through a pine forest, then—with relief—among fields. Only dimly realizing as yet all the absurdity and horror of the situation, and perhaps attempting to persuade himself that everything was very nice, Vasili Ivanovich contrived to enjoy the fleeting gifts of the road. And

indeed, how enticing it all is, what charm the world acquires when it is wound up and moving like a merry-go-round! The burning sun crept toward a corner of the window and suddenly spilled over the yellow bench. The badly pressed shadow of the car sped madly along the grassy bank, where flowers blended into colored streaks. A crossing: a cyclist was waiting, one foot resting on the ground. Trees appeared in groups and singly, revolving coolly and blandly, displaying the latest fashions. The blue dampness of a ravine. A memory of love, disguised as a meadow. Wispy clouds—greyhounds of heaven.” -Nabokov, “Cloud, Castle, Lake”

“Never marry a man you wouldn't want to be divorced from.” --Nora Ephron

POLONIUS My lord, I will use them according to their desert.

HAMLET God's bodykins, man, much better. Use every man after his desert, and who should 'scape whipping? Use them after your own honor and dignity. The less they deserve, the more merit is in your bounty. --Hamlet II, 2

“There is one point at which the moral sense and the artistic sense lie very near together; that is, in the light of the very obvious truth that the deepest quality of a work of art will always be the quality of the mind of the producer. In proportion as that mind is rich and noble will the novel, the picture, the statue, partake of the substance of beauty and truth. To be constituted of such elements is, to my vision, to have purpose enough.”
--Henry James, “The Art of Fiction”

“When the tree falls the monkeys scatter.” --The Story of the Stone (256)

“The pencil of the Holy Ghost hath labored more in describing the afflictions of Job than the felicities of Solomon.” - Francis Bacon

Alles in der Welt lässt sich ertragen,
Nur nicht eine Reihe von schönen Tagen. --Goethe, from Sprichwörtlich

Nun schaut der Geist nicht vorwärts, nicht zurück,
Die Gegenwart allein - ist unser Glück. --Goethe, Faust II

“[The poet] is never the bundle of accidents and incoherence that sits down to breakfast; he has been re-born as an idea, something intended, complete.”
-W. B. Yeats

“The basis of literary friendship is mixing the poison bowl.” -Oscar Wilde

“Nothing happens to those who cannot tell stories.” --Henry James

“If we only wanted to be happy it would be easy; but we want to be happier than other people, which is almost always difficult, since we think them happier than they are.”
-Montesquieu

“Man creates the human world, creates it by transforming himself into the facts of society: by thinking it he recreates his own creations, traverses over again the paths he has already traversed, reconstructs the whole ideally, and thus knows it with full and true knowledge.”
-Croce paraphrasing Vico, UoL p.142

It is difficult to get a man to understand something when his salary depends on his not understanding it.
-Upton Sinclair

Chi non ha la forza di uccidere la realtà non ha la forza di crearla.
 –Francesco di Sanctis, quoted in Beckett's Proust (89)

Good prose is like a window pane. –Orwell

Les choses sont belles lorsqu'elle s'accordent avec leur propre nature et avec la nôtre. –Epigrammatum Delectus (1659)

A king is but a foolish labourer
 Who wastes his blood to be another's dream. –Yeats, "Fergus and the Druid"

To an exact Perfection they have brought
 The Action Love, the Passion is forgot. –Rochester

A book is a mirror: if an ass peers into it, you can't expect an apostle to look out.
 –Lichtenberg

By the time a writer discovers he has no talent for literature, he is too successful to give it up. –George Kaufman

Men can only be happy when they do not assume that the object of life is happiness.
 –George Orwell

«Persone n'aime les missionnaires armés». –Robespierre.
 [Also cited as "Les peuples n'aiment pas..."]

L'amour, tel qu'il existe dans la société, n'est que l'échange de deux fantaisies et le contact de deux épidermes. –Chamfort

Quitter la partie c'est gagner. –Chamfort?

We do not see the world as it is. We see the world as we are. –Buddhist saying

A work of art is a corner of creation seen through a temperament. –Cézanne

He had "a whim of iron." –Anthony Powell of John Betjeman

Cette vie est un hôpital où chaque malade est possédé du desir de changer de lit.
 –Baudelaire

What we take for virtues is often no more than a collection of diverse actions and interests which fortune or our ingenuity knows how to arrange, and it is not always out of valor and chastity that men are valiant and women chaste.
 –La Rochefoucauld

Old men love to give good advice in order to console themselves for no longer being in condition to give bad examples. –La Rochefoucauld

Nothing so much prevents us from being natural as the desire to appear so.
 –La Rochefoucauld

The history of a soldier's wound beguiles the pain of it. —*Tristram Shandy*

Toutes choses sont dit déjà, mais parce que personne n'écoute, il faut toujours recommencer. —Gide

At the origin of every fortune lies a crime. —Honoré de Balzac

Old age is like the last glorious jiffy in a person's life, in which he, like the twilight, shines, though weakly, with all his might, before finally dissolving into the ultimate world of nothingness.—CMC Frosh from Korea whose name I've, alas, forgotten

A quibble [or pun] is to *Shakespeare*, what luminous vapours are to the traveller; he follows it at all adventures; it is sure to lead him out of his way, and sure to engulf him in the mire. It has some malignant power over his mind, and its fascinations are irresistible. Whatever be the dignity or profundity of his disquisition, whether he be enlarging knowledge or exalting affection, whether he be amusing attention with incidents, or enchaining it in suspense, let but a quibble spring up before him, and he leaves his work unfinished. A quibble is the golden apple for which he will always turn aside from his career, or stoop from his elevation. A quibble, poor and barren as it is, gave him such delight, that he was content to purchase it, by the sacrifice of reason, propriety and truth. A quibble was to him the fatal *Cleopatra* for which he lost the world, and was content to lose it.

—Samuel Johnson, "Preface to *Shakespeare*"

John Ogilby (Ogilby), 1600-76. This gentleman, whose name, thanks to our author and Pope, has become almost proverbial for a bad poet, was originally a Scottish dancing master. He translated the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, the *Aeneid*, and Aesop's *Fables* into verse; and his versions were splendidly adorned with sculpture. He also wrote three epic poems, one of which was fortunately burned in the fire of London." --Footnote from Walter Scott's edition of Dryden

From whence, then, arises that emulation which runs through all the different ranks of men, and what are the advantages which we propose by that great purpose of human life which we call bettering our condition? To be observed, to be attended to, to be taken notice of with sympathy, complacency, and approbation, are all the advantages which we can propose to derive from it. It is the vanity, not the ease, or the pleasure, which interests us. But vanity is always founded upon the belief of our being the object of attention and approbation. The rich man glories in his riches, because he feels that they naturally draw upon him the attention of the world, and that mankind are disposed to go along with him in all those agreeable emotions with which the advantages of his situation so readily inspire him. At the thought of this, his heart seems to swell and dilate itself within him, and he is fonder of his wealth, upon this account, than for all the other advantages it procures him. The poor man, on the contrary, is ashamed of his poverty. He feels that it either places him out of the sight of mankind, or, that if they take any notice of him, they have, however, scarce any fellow-feeling with the misery and distress which he suffers. He is mortified upon both accounts. For though to be overlooked, and to be disapproved of, are things entirely different, yet as obscurity covers us from the daylight of honour and approbation, to feel that we are taken no notice of, necessarily damps the most agreeable hope, and disappoints the most ardent desire, of human nature. The poor man goes out and comes in unheeded, and when in the midst of a crowd is

in the same obscurity as if shut up in his own hovel. Those humble cares and painful attentions which occupy those in his situation, afford no amusement to the dissipated and the gay. They turn away their eyes from him, or if the extremity of his distress forces them to look at him, it is only to spurn so disagreeable an object from among them. The fortunate and the proud wonder at the insolence of human wretchedness, that it should dare to present itself before them, and with the loathsome aspect of its misery presume to disturb the serenity of their happiness. The man of rank and distinction, on the contrary, is observed by all the world. Every body is eager to look at him, and to conceive, at least by sympathy, that joy and exultation with which his circumstances naturally inspire him. His actions are the objects of the public care. Scarce a word, scarce a gesture, can fall from him that is altogether neglected. In a great assembly he is the person upon whom all direct their eyes; it is upon him that their passions seem all to wait with expectation, in order to receive that movement and direction which he shall impress upon them; and if his behaviour is not altogether absurd, he has, every moment, an opportunity of interesting mankind, and of rendering himself the object of the observation and fellow-feeling of every body about him. It is this, which, notwithstanding the restraint it imposes, notwithstanding the loss of liberty with which it is attended, renders greatness the object of envy, and compensates, in the opinion of all those mortifications which must mankind, all that toil, all that anxiety, be undergone in the pursuit of it; and what is of yet more consequence, all that leisure, all that ease, all that careless security, which are forfeited for ever by the acquisition.

--Adam Smith, Theory of Moral Sentiments 2