

67 QUOTATIONS



Washington Irving

(1783-1859)

Washington Irving was the first American literary writer to attain popularity and international stature. He is an elegant stylist, moralist and sentimental humorist who wrote two classic stories, “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” and “Rip Van Winkle” (1819). His mock heroic chronicle *A History of New York from the Beginning of the World to the End of the Dutch Dynasty* contains “Among many Surprising and Curious Matters, the Unutterable ponderings of Walter the Doubter, the Disastrous Projects of William the Testy, and the chivalric achievements of Peter the Headstrong, the three Dutch Governors of New Amsterdam; being the only Authentic History of the Times that ever hath been published.” Postmodern critics have largely dismissed Irving as insipid and politically incorrect. Nevertheless, beyond his two great stories Irving remains instructive in modeling Victorianism, as in “The Wife” and “The Pride of the Village.” Whereas Hawthorne is a Victorian feminist who idealizes women, Irving is a Victorian gentleman who caters to the female audience while also tactfully criticizing “the affable sex.”

ORDER OF TOPICS: character, common people, law, acting, Europe, women, Victorianism, marriage, Angel in the House, hippie in the hills, pastoralism, books, literature, writing, wit and humor, Ichabod Crane, Indians, blacks, history, change, most recurrent theme, old age, death:

CHARACTER

Great minds have purposes; others have wishes.

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

Jealous people poison their own banquet and then eat it.

Little minds are tamed and subdued by misfortune; but great minds rise above them.

It is not poverty so much as pretense that harasses a ruined man—the struggle between a proud mind and an empty purse—the keeping up of a hollow show that must soon come to an end.

Some minds seem almost to create themselves, springing up under every disadvantage and working their solitary but irresistible way through a thousand obstacles.

The easiest thing to do, whenever you fail, is to put yourself down by blaming your lack of ability for your misfortunes.

Who ever heard of fat men heading a riot, or herding together in turbulent mobs?

COMMON PEOPLE

There is a healthful hardiness about real dignity that never dreads contact and communion with others however humble.

A barking dog is often more useful than a sleeping lion.

They who drink beer will think beer.

LAW

The portion of a law usually found unconstitutional is the teeth.

ACTING

Acting provides the fulfillment of never being fulfilled. You're never as good as you'd like to be. So there's always something to hope for.

EUROPE

I was anxious to see the great men of Europe, for I had read in the works of various philosophers that all animals degenerated in America, and man among the number. A great man of Europe, I thought, must therefore be superior to a great man of America as a peak of the Alps to a highland of the Hudson; and in this idea I was confirmed by observing the comparative importance and swelling magnitude of many English travelers among us, who, I was assured, were very little people in their own country. I will visit this land of wonders, thought I, and see the gigantic race from which I am degenerated.

WOMEN

A woman's whole life is a history of the affections.

Ichabod Crane had a soft and foolish heart toward the sex.

Kindness in women, not their beautiful looks, shall win my love.

A kind heart is a fountain of gladness, making everything in its vicinity freshen into smiles.

I profess not to know how women's hearts are moved and won. To me they have always been matters of riddle and admiration.

After all, it is the divinity within that marks the divinity without; and I have been more fascinated by a woman of talent and intelligence, though deficient in personal charms, than I have been by the most regular beauty.

Katherina Van Tassel, the daughter and only child of a substantial Dutch Farmer...was a blooming lass of fresh eighteen; plump as a partridge, ripe and melting and rosy-cheeked as one of her father's peaches, and

universally famed, not merely for her beauty, but her vast expectations. She was withal a little of a coquette.

An inexhaustible good nature is one of the most precious gifts of heaven, spreading itself like oil over the troubled sea of thought, and keeping the mind smooth and equable in the roughest weather.

A tart temper never mellows with age, and a sharp tongue is the only edged tool that grows keener with constant use.

Certain it is that [Rip] was a great favorite among all the good wives of the village, who, as usual with the amiable sex, took his part in all family squabbles and never failed, whenever they talked those matters over in their evening gossipings, to lay all the blame on Dame Van Winkle.

VICTORIANISM

There is a sacredness in tears.

I don't mind living in a man's world as long as I can be a woman in it.

Surely happiness is reflective, like the light of heaven; and every countenance, bright with smiles, and glowing with innocent enjoyment, is a mirror transmitting to others the rays of a supreme and ever-shining benevolence.

“You call yourself poor, my friend; you were never so rich—you never knew the boundless treasures of excellence you possessed in that woman.”

He was quite a novice in seduction, and blushed and faltered at his own baseness; but so innocent of mind was his intended victim that she was at first at a loss to comprehend his meaning, and why she should leave her native village and the humble roof of her parents. When at last the nature of his proposals flashed upon her pure mind the effect was withering. She did not weep—she did not break forth into reproaches—she said not a word—but she shrunk back aghast as from a viper, gave him a look of anguish that pierced to his very soul, and, clasping her hands in agony, fled, as if for refuge, to her father's cottage.... The officer retired, confounded, humiliated and repentant.... The shock which the poor girl had received, in the destruction of all her ideal world, had indeed been cruel. Faintings and hysterics had at first shaken her tender frame, and were succeeded by a settled and pining melancholy.

MARRIAGE

I have observed that a married man falling into misfortune is more apt to retrieve his situation in the world than a single one, partly because he is more stimulated to exertion by the necessities of the helpless and beloved beings who depend upon him for subsistence, but chiefly because his spirits are soothed and relieved by domestic endearments, and his self-respect kept alive by finding that, though all abroad is darkness and humiliation, yet there is still a little world of love at home, of which he is the monarch. Whereas a single man is apt to run to waste and self-neglect, to fancy himself lonely and abandoned, and his heart to fall to ruin like some deserted mansion for want of an inhabitant.

His wife “ruled the roost,” and in governing the governor, governed the province, which might thus be said to be under petticoat government.

Those men are most apt to be obsequious and conciliating abroad, who are under the discipline of shrews at home.

Marriage is the torment of one, the felicity of two, the strife and enmity of three.

ANGEL IN THE HOUSE

As the vine, which has long twined its graceful foliage about the oak and been lifted by it into sunshine, will, when the hardy plant is rifted by the thunderbolt, cling around it with its caressing tendrils and bind up its shattered boughs, so is it beautifully ordered by Providence, that woman, who is the mere dependent and ornament of man in his happier hours, should be his stay and solace when smitten with sudden calamity, winding herself into the rugged recesses of his nature, tenderly supporting the drooping head, and binding up the broken heart.

There is in every true woman's heart a spark of heavenly fire, which lies dormant in the broad daylight of prosperity, but which kindles up, and beams and blazes in the dark hour of adversity. No man knows what the wife of his bosom is—no man knows what a ministering angel she is—until he has gone with her through the fiery trials of this world.

HIPPIE IN THE HILLS

A good-natured fellow, of the name of Rip Van Winkle... The great error in Rip's composition was an insuperable aversion to all kinds of profitable labor...a kind neighbor, and an obedient henpecked husband...the unlucky Rip was at length routed by his termagant wife...

PASTORALISM

There is a serene and settled majesty to woodland scenery that enters into the soul and delights and elevates it, and fills it with noble inclinations.

In rural occupation there is nothing mean and debasing. It leads man forth among scenes of natural grandeur and beauty; it leaves him to the workings of his own mind, operated upon by the purest and most elevating of external influences.

There is certainly something in angling, if we could forget, which anglers are apt to do, the cruelties and tortures inflicted on worms and insects, that tends to produce a gentleness of spirit and a pure serenity of mind.

I hooked myself instead of the fish; tangled my line in every tree; lost my bait; broke my rod; until I gave up in despair and passed the day under the trees reading old Izaak [Walton].

BOOKS

The scholar only knows how dear these silent, yet eloquent, companions of pure thoughts and innocent hours become in the season of adversity. When all that is worldly turns to dross around us, these only retain their steady value.

LITERATURE

Every one knows the all-pervading influence of literature at the present day, and how much the opinions and passions of mankind are under its control.

Language gradually varies, and with it fade away the writings of authors who have flourished their allotted time.

There arise authors now and then, who seem proof against the mutability of language, because they have rooted themselves in the unchanging principles of human nature.

WRITING

I am always at a loss how much to believe my own stories.

What revelry of the mind I have enjoyed; what fairy castles I have built—and *inhabited*.

Others may write from the head, but he writes from the heart, and the heart will always understand him.

I have wandered through different countries, and witnessed many of the shifting scenes of life. I cannot say that I have studied them with the eye of a philosopher, but rather with the sauntering gaze with which humble lovers of the picturesque stroll from the window of one print shop to another, caught sometimes by the delineations of beauty, sometimes by the distortions of caricature, and sometimes by the loveliness of landscape. As it is the fashion for modern tourists to travel pencil in hand and bring home their portfolios filled with sketches, I am disposed to get up a few for the entertainment of my friends.

The play of thought, and sentiment, and language, the weaving in of characters, lightly, yet expressively delineated, the familiar and faithful exhibition of scenes in common life, and the half-concealed vein of humor that is often played through the whole,—these are among what I aim at, and upon which I felicitate myself in proportion as I think I succeed.

WIT AND HUMOR

I've had it with your constipation!

A History of New York from the Beginning of the World, Chapter II: Cosmogony, or Creation of the World; with a multitude of excellent theories, by which the creation of a world is shown to be no such difficult matter as common folks would imagine.

Wit, after all, is a might tart, pungent ingredient, and much too acid for some stomachs; but honest good humor is the oil and wine of a merry meeting, and there is no jovial companionship equal to that where the jokes are rather small, and the laughter abundant.

ICHABOD CRANE

Ichabod Crane...sojourned, or, as he expressed it, "tarried," in Sleepy Hollow, for the purpose of instructing the children of the vicinity.... The cognomen of Crane was not inapplicable to his person. He was tall, but exceedingly lank, with narrow shoulders, long arms and legs, hands that dangled a mile out of his sleeves, feet that might have served for shovels, and his whole frame most loosely hung together. His head was small, and flat at top, with huge ears, large green glassy eyes, and a long snipe nose, so that it looked like a weathercock, perched upon his spindle neck, to tell which way the wind blew. To see him striding along the profile of a hill on a windy day, with his clothes bagging and fluttering about him, one might have mistaken him for the genius of famine descending upon the earth, or some scarecrow eloped from a cornfield.

The hair of the affrighted pedagogue rose upon his head with terror.

INDIANS

Such was the fate of Philip of Pokanoket, an Indian warrior, whose name was once a terror throughout Massachusetts and Connecticut. He was the most distinguished of a number of contemporary Sachems who reigned over the Pequods, the Narragansets, the Wampanoags, and the other eastern tribes at the time of the first settlement of New England; a band of native untaught heroes, who made the most generous struggle of which human nature is capable, fighting to the last gasp in the cause of their country, without a hope of victory or a thought of renown.

BLACKS

The musician was an old gray-haired negro, who had been the itinerant orchestra of the neighborhood for more than half a century.

[Ichabod Crane dancing and "clattering about the room"] was the admiration of all the negroes; who, having gathered, of all ages and sizes, from the farm and the neighborhood, stood forming a pyramid of shining black faces at every door and window, gazing with delight at the scene, rolling their white eyeballs, and showing grinning rows of ivory from ear to ear.

HISTORY

History fades into fable; fact becomes clouded with doubt and controversy; the inscription molds from the tablet; the statue falls from the pedestal.

CHANGE

There's a certain relief in change, even though it be from bad to worse; as I have found in traveling in a stage coach, that it is often a comfort to shift one's position and be bruised in a new place.

MOST RECURRENT THEME

How the truth presses home upon us as we advance in life that everything around us is transient and uncertain.... We feel it withering at our hearts...in the funerals of our friends and written on the wrecks of our hopes and affections—when I look back for a few short years, what changes of all kind have taken place, what wrecks of time and fortune are strewn around me.

OLD AGE

Whenever a man's friends begin to compliment him about looking young, he may be sure that they think he is growing old.

Youth fades; love droops; the leaves of friendship fall; a mother's secret hope outlives them all.

After a man passes 60, his mischief is mainly in his head.

That happy age when a man can be idle with impunity.

Age is a matter of feeling, not of years.

My only fear is that I may live too long

DEATH

The natural effect of sorrow over the dead is to refine and elevate the mind.

