

## 63 QUOTATIONS



Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

(1807-1882)

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was the most popular American poet in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, employing the conventions, expressing the sentimentality and affirming the ideals of Victorianism—representing in poetry what Washington Irving represented in fiction. He was the mainstream inspirational poet while Walt Whitman was the inspirational revolutionary poet. His vision and aesthetics are the exact opposite of those prevailing during the Postmodern Period of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Whereas few today read Postmodern writers because of their obscurity and cynicism, many thousands still read Longfellow.

ORDER OF TOPICS: youth, aspiration, education, translations, wreck of the Hesperus, young America, urban security, progress, human nature, Victorianism, woman, love, charity, pastoralism, Puritan heritage, literature, critics, health, religion, sleep, inspiration, death, last words, immortality:

### YOUTH

I most eagerly aspire after a future eminence in literature; my whole soul burns ardently for it, and every earthly thought centres in it.

### ASPIRATION

If you would hit the mark, you must aim a little above it.

In this world a man must either be hammer or an anvil.

Lives of great men all remind us, we can make our lives sublime, and, departing, leave behind us, footprints on the sands of time.

Heights by great men reached and kept were not attained by sudden flight, but, while their companions slept, they were toiling upward in the night.

We have but one life here on earth. We must make that beautiful. And to do this health and elasticity of mind are needful; and whatever endangers or impedes these must be avoided.

Ambition is so powerful a passion in the human breast, that however high we reach we are never satisfied.

Most people would succeed in small things if they were not troubled with great ambitions.

#### EDUCATION

Thought takes man out of servitude into freedom.

I have taken to the Greek poets again, and mean to devote one hour every morning to them. Began to-day with Anacreon. What exquisite language! Why did I ever forget my Greek?

#### TRANSLATIONS

I agree with you entirely in what you say about translations. It is like running a ploughshare through the soil of one's mind; a thousand germs of thought start up (excuse the agricultural figure), which otherwise might have lain and rotted in the ground. Still, it sometimes seems to me like an excuse for being lazy,—like leaning on another man's shoulder.

#### WRECK OF THE HESPERUS

News of shipwrecks horrible on the coast. 20 bodies washed ashore near Gloucester, one lashed to a piece of wreck.

I have broken ground in a new field, namely, ballads; beginning with the "Wreck of the Schooner Hesperus," on the reef of Norman's Woe, in the great storm of a fortnight ago. I shall send it to some newspaper. I think I shall write more. The *national ballad* is a virgin soil here in New England; and there are great materials. Besides, I have a great notion of working upon the *people's* feelings. I am going to have one printed on a sheet with a coarse picture on it. I desire new sensation and a new set of critics. Nat. Hawthorne is tickled with the idea.

#### YOUNG AMERICA

Listen, my children, and you shall hear, / Of the midnight ride of Paul Revere.

#### URBAN SECURITY

I have an affection for a great city. I feel safe in the neighborhood of man, and enjoy the sweet security of the streets.

#### PROGRESS

Each subsiding century reveals some new mystery; we build where monsters used to hide themselves.

#### HUMAN NATURE

Man is always more than he can know of himself.

We judge ourselves by what we feel capable of doing, while others judge us by what we have already done.

#### VICTORIANISM

Like a French poem is life; being only perfect in structure when with the masculine rhymes mingled the feminine are.

As unto the bow the cord is, / So unto the man is woman, / Though she bends him, she obeys him, / Though she draws him, yet she follows, / Useless each without the other!

A Lady with a Lamp shall stand / In the great history of the land, / A noble type of good, / Heroic womanhood.

Stay, stay at home, my heart and rest; / Housekeeping hearts are happiest.

#### WOMAN

When she was good she was very, very good. But when she was bad she was horrid.

#### LOVE

Love keeps the cold out better than a cloak.

Talk not of wasted affection—affection was never wasted.

There is nothing holier in this life of ours than the first consciousness of love, the first fluttering of its silken wings.

#### CHARITY

Give what you have to somebody, it may be better than you think.

That which the fountain sends forth returns again to the fountain.

The life of a man consists not in seeing visions and dreaming dreams, but in active charity and in willing service.

If we could read the secret history of our enemies we should find in each man's life sorrow and suffering enough to disarm all hostility.

#### PASTORALISM

Kind hearts are the gardens. Kind thoughts are the roots. Kind words are the flowers. Kind deeds are the fruits. Take care of your garden and keep out the weeds. Fill it with sunshine, kind words and kind deeds.

#### PURITAN HERITAGE

The greatest firmness is the greatest mercy.

In character, in manner, in style, in all things, the supreme excellence is simplicity.

Perseverance is a great element of success. If you only knock long enough and loud enough at the gate, you are sure to wake up somebody.

He that respects himself is safe from others. He wears a coat of mail that none can pierce.

Not in the shouts and plaudits of the throng, but in ourselves, are triumph and defeat.

#### LITERATURE

Art is the child of Nature.

[Hawthorne is] a man of genius.

The love of learning, the sequestered nooks, and all the sweet serenity of books.

The bards sublime, / Whose distant footsteps echo / Through the corridors of Time.

Men of genius are often dull and inert in society; as the blazing meteor, when it descends to earth, is only a stone.

#### CRITICS

The strength of criticism lies in the weakness of the thing criticized.

[Critics are like] woodpeckers, who, instead of enjoying the fruit and shadow of a tree, hop incessantly around the trunk pecking holes in the bark to discover some little worm or another.

A young critic is like a boy with a gun: he fires at every living thing he sees. He thinks only of his own skill, not the pain he is giving.

#### HEALTH

Joy, temperance, and repose, slam the door on the doctor's nose.

#### RELIGION

Nature is a revelation of God; Art is a revelation of man.

Morality without religion is only a kind of dead reckoning—an endeavor to find our place on a cloudy sea by measuring the distance we have run, but without any observation of the heavenly bodies.

#### SLEEP

Sleep... Oh! How I loathe those little slices of death.

#### INSPIRATION

Into each life some rain must fall.

The lowest ebb is the turn of the tide.

The nearer the dawn the darker the night.

The sky is filled with stars, invisible by day.

The rapture of pursuing is the prize the vanquished gain.

Our pleasures and our discontents, / Are rounds by which we may ascend.

Let us, then, be up and doing, / With a heart for any fate; / Still achieving, still pursuing, / Learn to labour and to wait.

Our ingress into the world was naked and bare; our progress through the world is trouble and care; our egress from the world will be nobody knows where; but if we do well here we shall do well there.

Ah, nothing is too late, / Till the tired heart shall cease to palpitate.

#### DEATH

The long mysterious Exodus of death.

Dust thou art, to dust thou returnest, / Was not spoken of the soul.

Art is long, and Time is fleeting, / And our hearts, though stout and brave, / Still, like muffled drums are beating / Funeral marches to the grave.

## LAST WORDS

Now I know that I must be very ill, since you have been sent for. [to his sister]

## IMMORTALITY

The grave itself is but a covered bridge leading from light to light, through a brief darkness.

There is no Death! What seems so is transition; / This life of mortal breath / Is but a suburb of the life  
elysian, / Whose portal we call Death.

