

## Quotes from *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

### Chapter 1

1. "What odd chaps you painters are! You do anything in the world to gain a reputation. As soon as you have one, you seem to want to throw it away. It is silly of you, for there is only one thing in the world worse than being talked about, and that is not being talked about. A portrait like this would set you far above all the young men in England, and make the old men jealous, if old men are ever capable of any emotion."
2. "But beauty, real beauty, ends where an intellectual expression begins. Intellect is in itself a mode of exaggeration, and destroys the harmony of any face. The moment one sits down to think, one becomes all nose, or all forehead, or something horrid. Look at the successful men in any of the learned professions. How perfectly hideous they are! Except, of course, in the Church. But then in the Church they don't think."
3. "It is better not to be different from one's fellows. The ugly and the stupid have the best of it in this world. They can sit at their ease and gape at the play. If they know nothing of victory, they are at least spared the knowledge of defeat... Your rank and wealth, Harry; my brains, such as they are – my art, whatever it may be worth; Dorian Gray's good looks – we shall all suffer for what the gods have given us, suffer terribly."
4. "The one charm about marriage is that it makes a life of deception absolutely necessary for both parties. I never know where my wife is, and my wife never knows what I am doing."
5. "Conscience and cowardice are really the same things, Basil. Conscience is the trade-name of the firm. That is all."
6. "I choose my friends for their good looks, my acquaintances for their good characters, and my enemies for their good intellects."
7. "If one puts forward an idea to a true Englishman—always a rash thing to do—he never dreams of considering whether the idea is right or wrong. The only thing he considers of any importance is whether one believes it oneself. Now, the value of an idea has nothing whatsoever to do with the sincerity of the man who expresses it. Indeed, the probabilities are that the more insincere the man is, the more purely intellectual will the idea be, as in that case it will not be colored by either his wants, his desires, or his prejudices."
8. "Poets are not as scrupulous as you are. They know how useful passion is for publication. Nowadays a broken heart will run to many editions."
9. "It is a sad thing to think of, but there is no doubt that Genius lasts longer than Beauty. That accounts for the fact that we all take such pains to over-educate ourselves. In the wild struggle for existence, we want to have something that endures, and so we fill our minds with rubbish and facts, in the silly hope of keeping our place. The thoroughly well-informed man—that is the modern ideal. And the mind of the thoroughly well-informed man is a dreadful thing. It is like a bric-a-brac shop, all monsters and dust, with everything priced above its proper value."
10. "Those who are faithful know only the trivial side of love: it is the faithless who know love's tragedies."
11. "Each class would have preached the importance of those virtues, for whose exercise there was no necessity in their own lives. The rich would have spoken on the value of thrift, and the idle grown eloquent over the dignity of labor."

### Chapter 2

1. "Have you really a bad influence, Lord Henry? As bad as Basil says?"  
"There is no such thing as a good influence, Mr. Gray. All influence is immoral – immoral from the scientific point of view."  
"Why?"  
"Because to influence a person is to give him one's own soul. He does not think his natural thoughts or burn with his natural passions. His virtues are not real to him. His sins, if there are

such things as sins, are borrowed. He becomes an echo of someone else's music, an actor of a part that has not been written for him. The aim of life is self-development. To realize one's nature perfectly – that is what each of us is here for. People are afraid of themselves, nowadays. They have forgotten the highest of all duties, the duty that one owes to one's self. Of course they are charitable. They feed the hungry, and clothe the beggar. But their own souls starve, and are naked. Courage has gone out of our race. Perhaps we never really had it. The terror of society, which is the basis of morals, the terror of God, which is the secret of religion – these are the two things that govern us. And yet if one man were to live his life fully and completely, were to give form to every feeling, expression to every thought, reality to every dream – I believe that the world would gain such a fresh impulse of joy that we would forget all the maladies of medievalism... The mutilation of the savage has its tragic survival in the self-denial that mars our lives. We are punished for our refusals. Every impulse that we strive to strangle broods in the mind, and poisons us. The body sins once, and has done with its sin, for action is a mode of purification. Nothing remains then but the recollections of a pleasure, or the luxury of a regret. The only way to get rid of a temptation is to yield to it. Resist it, and your soul grows sick with longing for the things it has forbidden to itself, with desire for what its monstrous laws have made monstrous and unlawful. It has been said that the great events of the world take place in the brain. It is in the brain, and the brain only, that the great sins of the world take place also.

2. "One of the great secrets of life – to cure the soul by means of the senses, and the senses by means of the soul. You are a wonderful creation. You know more than you think you know, just as you know less than you want to know."
3. "And Beauty is a form of Genius—is higher, indeed, than Genius, as it needs no explanation. It is of the great facts of the world, like sunlight, or springtime, or the reflection in dark waters of that silver shell we call the moon. It cannot be questioned. It has its divine right of sovereignty. It makes princes of those who have it. You smile? Ah! When you have lost it you won't smile. . . . People say sometimes that Beauty is only superficial. That may be so. But at least it is not as superficial as Thought is. To me, Beauty is the wonder of wonders. It is only shallow people who do not judge by appearances. The true mystery of the world is the visible, not the invisible. . . ."
4. "Always! That is a dreadful word. It makes me shudder when I hear it. Women are so fond of using it. They spoil every romance by trying to make it last forever. It is a meaningless word too. The only difference between a caprice and a life-long passion is that the caprice lasts a little longer."
5. "What a fuss people make about fidelity! Why, even in love it is purely a question for physiology. It has nothing to do with our own will. Young men want to be faithful, and are not. Old men want to be faithless and cannot. That is all one can say."

### Chapter 3

1. "Young people, nowadays, imagine that money is everything." said Lord Fermor. "Yes," murmured Lord Henry, settling his buttonhole in his coat; "and when they grow old they know it. But I don't want money. It is only people who pay their bills who want that, Uncle George, and I never pay mine. Credit is the capital of a younger son, and one lives charmingly upon it. Besides, I always deal with Dartmoor's tradesmen, and consequently they never bother me. What I want is information; not useful information, of course; useless information."

2. "Examinations, sir, are pure humbug from beginning to end. If a man is a gentleman, he knows quite enough, and if he is not a gentleman, whatever he knows is bad for him."
3. "American girls are as clever at concealing their parents as English women are at concealing their past."
4. "Tell your Aunt Agatha, Harry, not to bother me any more with her charity appeals. I am sick of them. Why, the good woman thinks I have nothing to do but to write cheques for her silly fads."  
"All right, Uncle George. I'll tell her, but it won't have any effect. *Philanthropic people lose all sense of humanity. It is their distinguishing characteristic.*"
5. "They say that when good Americans die they go to Paris."  
"Really! And where do bad Americans go to when they die?"  
"They go to America" murmured Lord Henry.
6. "I can sympathize with everything, except suffering", cried Lord Harry, Shrugging his shoulders. "I cannot sympathize with that. It is too ugly, too horrible, too distressing. There is something terribly morbid in the modern sympathy with pain."
7. "I don't desire to change anything in England except the weather. I am quite content with philosophical contemplation. But as the nineteenth century has gone bankrupt through an over-expenditure of sympathy, I would suggest that we should appeal to Science to put us straight. *The advantage of the emotions is that they lead us astray, and the advantage of Science is that it is not emotional.*"
8. "Humanity takes itself too seriously. It is the world's original sin. If the caveman had known how to laugh, History would have been different."
9. "When an old woman like myself blushes, it is a very bad sign. Ah! Lord Henry, I wish you would tell me how to become young again."  
He thought for a moment. "Can you remember any great error that you committed in your early days, Duchess?" he asked, looking at her across the table.  
"A great many, I fear" she cried.  
  
"Then commit them over again," he said, gravely. "To get back one's youth, one has merely to repeat one's follies. Yes that is one of the great secrets of life. Nowadays, most people die of a sort of creeping coming sense, and discover when it is too late that the only things one never regrets are one's mistakes."

#### Chapter 4

1. "Nowadays people know the price of everything and the value of nothing."
2. "Never marry at all, Dorian. Men marry because they are tired. Women, because they are curious. Both are disappointed."
3. "Women represent the triumph of matter over mind, just as men represent the triumph of mind over morals."
4. "The people who love only once in their lives are really the shallow people. What they call their loyalty, and their fidelity, I call either the lethargy of custom or their lack of imagination. Faithfulness is to the emotional life what consistency is to the life of the intellect – simply a confession of failures."
5. "When one is in love, one always begins by deceiving one's self, and one always ends by deceiving others. That is what the world calls a romance."

6. "He told me once, with an air of pride that his five bankruptcies were entirely due to "The Bard" as he insisted on calling him. He seemed to think it a distinction."  
"It was a distinction, my dear Dorian – a great distinction. *Most people become bankrupt through having invested too heavily in the prose of life. To have ruined one's self over poetry is an honor.*"
7. "It is personalities and not principals that move the age."
8. "The only artists I have ever known, who are personally delightful, are bad artists. Good artists exist simply in what they make, and consequently are perfectly uninteresting in what they are. A great poet, a really great poet, is the most un-poetical of all creatures. But inferior poets are absolutely fascinating. The worse their rhymes are, the more picturesque they look. The mere fact of having published a book of second-rate sonnets makes a man quite irresistible. He lives the poetry he cannot write. The other write the poetry that they dare not realize."
9. "As it was, we always misunderstood ourselves and rarely understood others. Experience was of no ethical value. It was merely the name men gave to their mistakes. Moralists had, as a rule, regarded it as a mode of warning, had claimed for it a certain ethical efficacy in the formation of character, had praised it as something that taught us what to follow and what to avoid. But there was no motive power in experience. It was as little of an active cause as conscience itself. All that it really demonstrated was that our future would be the same as our past, and that the sin we had done once, and with loathing, we would do many times, and with joy."
10. "It was the passions about whose origin we deceived ourselves that tyrannized most strongly over us. Our weakest motives were those of whose nature we were conscious. It often happened that when we thought we were experimenting on other we were really experimenting on ourselves."

## Chapter 6

1. "Whenever a man does a thoroughly stupid thing, it is always from the noblest motives."
2. "I never approve, or disapprove, of anything now. It is an absurd attitude towards life. We are not sent into the world to air our moral prejudices. I never take any notice of what common people say, and I never interfere with what charming people do... You know I am not a champion of marriage. The real drawback to marriage is that it makes one unselfish. And unselfish people are colorless. They lack individuality. Still there are certain temperaments that marriage makes more complex. They retain their egotism and add to it many other egos. They are forces to have more than one life. They become more highly organized, and to be highly organized is, I should fancy, the object of man's existence."
3. "The reason we all like to think so well of others is that we are all afraid for ourselves. The basis of optimism is sheer terror."
4. "My dear Harry, I did not treat it (marriage proposal) as a business transaction. I told her that I loved her, and she said she was not worthy to be my wife. Not worthy! Why, the whole world is nothing to me compared with her."  
"Women are wonderfully practical," murmured Lord Henry – "much more practical than we are. In situations of that kind we often forget to say anything about marriage, and they always remind us."
5. "Pleasure is Nature's test, her sign of approval. When we are happy we are always good, but when we are good we are not always happy. To be good is to be in harmony with one's self. Discord is to be forced to be in harmony with others... Individualism has really the higher aim."

Modern morality consists in accepting the standard of one's age. I consider that for any man of culture to accept the standard of his age is a form of the grossest immorality."

6. "I should fancy that the real tragedy of the poor is that they can afford nothing but self-denial. Beautiful sins, like beautiful things, are the privilege of the rich."
7. "Women, as some witty Frenchman once put it, inspire us with the desire to do masterpieces, and always prevent us from carrying them out."

## Chapter 8

1. "The only way a woman can ever reform a man is by boring him so completely that he loses all possible interest in life."
2. "There is a fatality about good resolutions – they are always made too late."
3. "Good resolutions are useless attempts to interfere with scientific laws. Their origin is pure vanity. Their result is absolutely nil. They give us, now and then, some of those luxurious sterile emotions that have a certain charm for the weak. They are simply cheques that men draw on a bank where they have no account."
4. "It often happens that the real tragedies of life occur in such an inartistic manner that they hurt us by their crude violence, their absolute incoherence, their absurd want of meaning, their entire lack of style. They affect us just as vulgarity affects us. They give us an impression of sheer brute force, and we revolt against that. Sometimes, however, a tragedy that possesses artistic elements of beauty crosses our lives. If these elements of beauty are real, the whole thing simply appeals to our sense of dramatic effect. Suddenly we find that we are no longer the actors, but the spectators of the play. Or rather we are both. We watch ourselves, and the mere wonder of the spectacle entralls us."
5. "We live in an age that reads too much to be wise, and that thinks too much to be beautiful."

## Chapter 9

1. "It is only the shallow people who require years to get rid of an emotion. A man who is master of himself can end a sorrow as easily as he can invent a pleasure."

## Chapter 11

1. "The worship of the senses has often, and with much justice, been decried, men feeling a natural instinct of terror and passions and sensations that seem stronger than themselves, and that they are conscious of sharing with the less highly organized forms of existence."
2. "Yet there was to be, as Lord Henry had prophesied, a new Hedonism that was to recreate life, and to save it from that harsh, uncomely Puritanism that is having in our own day, its curious revival. It was to have its service of the intellect, certainly; yet, it was never to accept any theory or system that would involve the sacrifice of any mode of passionate experience. Its aim, indeed, was to be experience itself, and not the fruits of experience, sweet or bitter as they might be. Of the asceticism that deadens the senses, as of the vulgar profligacy that dulls them, it was to know nothing. But it was to teach man to concentrate himself upon the moments of a life that is itself but a moment."
3. "Society, civilized society at least, is never very ready to believe anything to the detriment of those are both rich and fascinating. It feels instinctively that manners are of more importance

than morals, and, in its opinion, the highest respectability is of much less value than the possession of a good chef.”

4. “Even the cardinal virtues cannot atone for half-cold *entrees*.”