



Joseph Henry Quotations

Compiled by the staff of the Joseph Henry Papers Project

Joseph Henry was a scientist, not a wordsmith. But his passion for pursuing and communicating scientific truths often imparted a universal meaning and timelessness to his words. Henry felt that science had profoundly shaped his own life, turning an uncertain adolescent from a humble background into a nationally respected educator and researcher. Science also helped Henry appreciate and understand the natural world, and allowed him to contribute to society by making discoveries that led to inventions such as the telegraph, the electric motor, and the telephone. To learn more about Henry, please go to our [introductory page](#).

Many of the selected quotations concern the power of science to reveal nature's secrets. Others concern Henry's thoughts about the Smithsonian Institution, which he directed from its inception in 1846 until his death in 1878, and which embodied his research vision. Also included are some of Henry's more memorable observations of the nation's capital, the United States Congress, and American society.

Where possible, the quotations include cited published sources; primarily *The Papers of Joseph Henry* (abbreviated as *Henry Papers*). As in the volumes of the *Henry Papers*, we have generally retained Henry's original spelling and punctuation. But to aid readability we have here eliminated indications of where Henry crossed out or inserted words.

- [On Science](#)
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Joseph Henry Quotations-- On Science

Basic Research

Nothing in the whole system of nature is isolated or unimportant. The fall of a leaf and the motion of a planet are governed by the same laws. . . . It is in the study of objects considered trivial and unworthy of notice by the casual observer that genius finds the most important and interesting phenomena. It was in the investigation of the varying colors of the soap-bubble that Newton detected the remarkable fact of the fits of easy reflection and easy refraction presented by a ray of light in its passage through space, and upon which he established the fundamental principle of the present generalization of the undulatory theory of light. . . . The microscopic organization of animals and plants is replete with the highest instruction; and, surely, in the language of one of the fathers of modern physical science, "nothing can be unworthy of being investigated by man which was thought worthy of being created by GOD."

Smithsonian Annual Report for 1852, p. 15.

Every well established truth is an addition to the sum of human power, and though it may not find an immediate application to the economy of every day life, we may safely commit it to the stream of time, in the confident anticipation that the world will not fail to realize its beneficial results.

Smithsonian Annual Report for 1856, p. 20.

Nearly all the great inventions which distinguish the present century are the results, immediately or remotely, of the application of scientific principles to practical purposes, and in most cases these applications have been suggested by the student of nature, whose primary object was the discovery of abstract truth.

Smithsonian Annual Report for 1859, p. 15.

The incessant call in this country for practical results and the confounding of mechanical inventions with scientific discoveries has a very prejudicial influence on science. . . . A single scientific principle may include a thousand applications and is therefore though if not of immediate use of vastly more importance even in a practical view.

Presidential address to the American Association for the Advancement of Science, [August 22, 1850], in *Henry Papers*, vol. 8, pp. 101-102.

How contemptible [*sic*] in the eyes of the heroes and statesmen of antiquity would have appeared the labours of that man who devoted his life to investigate the properties of the magnet; little could they anticipate that this humble mineral in after ages was destined to change the form and condition of human society in every quarter of the globe.

Introductory Lecture on Chemistry, [January-March, 1832], in *Henry Papers*, vol. 1, p. 396.



Knowledge

All knowledge is profitable; profitable in its ennobling effect on the character, in the pleasure it imparts in its acquisition, as well as in the power it gives over the operations of mind and of matter. All knowledge is useful; every part of this complex system of nature is connected with every other. Nothing is isolated. The discovery of to-day, which appears unconnected with any useful process, may, in the course of a few years, become the fruitful source of a thousand inventions.

Smithsonian Annual Report for 1851, p. 10.

[James] Smithson was well aware that knowledge should not be viewed as existing in isolated parts, but as a whole, each portion of which throws light on all the other[s], and that the tendency of all is to improve the human mind, and to give it new sources of power and enjoyment.

"On the Smithsonian Institution," August 1853, *Proceedings of the Third Session of the American Association for the Advancement of Education* (Newark, N.J., 1854), p. 101.

Man does not live by bread alone, there are other wants to be supplied, and even in a practical point of view, a single thought may be fraught with a thousand useful inventions.

Presidential address to the American Association for the Advancement of Education, August 1853, *Proceedings of the Third Session of the American Association for the Advancement of Education* (Newark, N.J., 1854), p. 29.

Astronomy was not studied by Kepler, Galileo, or Newton for the practical applications which might result from it, but to enlarge the bounds of knowledge, to furnish new objects of thought and contemplation in regard to the universe of which we form a part; yet how remarkable the influence which this science, apparently so far removed from the sphere of our material interests, has exerted on the destinies of the world!

Smithsonian Annual Report for 1859, p. 15.

There are no royal roads to knowledge, and we can only advance to new and important truths along the rugged path of experience, guided by cautious induction.

Smithsonian Annual Report for 1856, p. 36.

Nature

The operations of the universe are unlimited, and in the great book of nature, man has scarcely read more than the title page or the preface.

Remarks at the Laying of the Cornerstone of the American Museum of Natural History (New York), June 2, 1874, in Arthur P. Molella, et al., eds., *A Scientist in American Life: Essays and Lectures of Joseph Henry* (Washington, D.C., 1980), p. 115.



Science in America

No country in the world is so much indebted for its progress in power and intelligence to science than ours, and yet no country does so little to encourage or advance it.

Remarks at the Laying of the Cornerstone of the American Museum of Natural History (New York), June 2, 1874, in Arthur P. Molella, et al., eds., *A Scientist in American Life: Essays and Lectures of Joseph Henry* (Washington, D.C., 1980), p. 113.

In this country, science is almost exclusively prosecuted by those engaged in the laborious and exhaustive employment of imparting instruction. Science among us brings comparatively little emolument and is accompanied with but little honor.

On the Importance of the Cultivation of Science: Letter to the Committee of Arrangements of the Farewell Banquet to Professor Tyndall [February-April 1873], in Arthur P. Molella, et al., eds., *A Scientist in American Life: Essays and Lectures of Joseph Henry* (Washington, D.C., 1980), p. 106.

Scientific Spirit

There is poetry in science and the cultivation of the imagination [*sic*] is an essential prerequisite [*sic*] to the successful investigation of nature.

Presidential address to the American Association for the Advancement of Science, [August 22, 1850], in *Henry Papers*, vol. 8, p. 89.

It [science] offers unbounded fields of pleasurable, healthful, and ennobling exercise to the restless intellect of man, expanding his powers and enlarging his conceptions of the wisdom, the energy, and the beneficence of the Great Ruler of the universe.

Smithsonian Annual Report for 1859, p. 17.

The man imbued with the proper spirit of science does not seek for immediate pecuniary reward from the practical applications of his discoveries, but derives sufficient gratification from his pursuit and the consciousness of enlarging the bounds of human contemplation, and the magnitude of human power, and leaves to others to gather the golden fruit he may strew along his pathway.

On the Importance of the Cultivation of Science: Letter to the Committee of Arrangements of the Farewell Banquet to Professor Tyndall [February-April 1873], in Arthur P. Molella, et al., eds., *A Scientist in American Life: Essays and Lectures of Joseph Henry* (Washington, D.C., 1980), p. 105.

Truth

The great object of human thought is the discovery of truth or, in other words, to arrive at conceptions and expressions of things which shall agree with the nature of things.

Lecture on Geology and Revelation, ca. 1840s, in Arthur Molella et al., eds., *A Scientist in American Life: Essays and Lectures of Joseph Henry* (Washington, D.C., 1980), p. 24.



The Universe

A universe without law would be a universe without order, without the possibility of science, and the manifestations of an intelligent governor and creator.

Presidential address to the American Association for the Advancement of Science, [August 22, 1850], in *Henry Papers*, vol. 8, p. 99.

Placed in a universe of constant change, on an isolated globe surrounded by distant celestial objects on all sides, subjected to influences of various kinds, it is a sublime occupation to measure the earth and weigh the planets, to predict their changes, and even to discover the materials of which they are composed; to investigate the causes of the tempest and volcano; to bring the lightning from the clouds; to submit it to experiment by which it shall reveal its character; and to estimate the size and weight of those invisible atoms which constitute the *universe of things*.

On the Importance of the Cultivation of Science: Letter to the Committee of Arrangements of the Farewell Banquet to Professor Tyndall [February-April 1873], in Arthur P. Molella, et al., eds., *A Scientist in American Life: Essays and Lectures of Joseph Henry* (Washington, D.C., 1980), p. 104.

All parts of the material universe are in constant motion and though some of the changes may appear to be cyclical, nothing ever exactly returns, so far as human experience extends, to precisely the same condition.

Remarks at the Grave of Joseph Priestley, [July 1874], in Arthur P. Molella, et al., eds., *A Scientist in American Life: Essays and Lectures of Joseph Henry* (Washington, D.C., 1980), p. 119.

If, again with the light of science, we trace forward into the future the condition of our globe, we are compelled to admit that it cannot always remain in its present condition; that in time, the store of potential energy which now exists in the sun and in the bodies of celestial space which may fall into it will be dissipated in radiant heat, and consequently the earth, from being the theatre of life, intelligence, of moral emotions, must become a barren waste.

Remarks at the Grave of Joseph Priestley, [July 1874], in Arthur P. Molella, et al., eds., *A Scientist in American Life: Essays and Lectures of Joseph Henry* (Washington, D.C., 1980), p. 120.



Joseph Henry Quotations-- On the Smithsonian Institution

Congress/Federal Government

[The Smithsonian] is the Establishment of an individual and the more widely it is separated [*sic*] from the Government the brighter will be its prospects.

Letter to John Russell Bartlett, June 23, 1847, Ephraim George Squier Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

[Federal appropriations] would annually bring the institution before Congress as a supplicant for government patronage, and ultimately subject it to political influence and control. After an experience of three years, I am fully convinced that the true policy of the institution is to ask nothing from Congress except the safekeeping of its funds; to mingle its operations as little as possible with those of the general government. . . .

Smithsonian Annual Report for 1849, p. 21.

I do not think however that it would be well to mix up the affairs of the Institution with those of the government. They should through all time be kept separate and the former be preserved from political influence.

Letter to Bache, October 17, 1853, in *Henry Papers*, vol. 8, p. 485.

It [Congress] is however a body of rather fitful volitions and the less legislation in regard to the Smithsonian the better.

Letter to Brantz Mayer, August 5, 1857, Mayer-Roszel Collection, Maryland Historical Society.

My aim from the first has been to sustain the cosmopolitan character of the Institution while it has continued to render important service to the government, by which it is protected and sustained.

Letter to Felix Flugel, March 23, 1865, in *Henry Papers*, vol. 10, p. 491.

. . . the Institution is every year exhibited as a supplicant for aid from Congress and is consequently subjected in a degree to extraneous direction and control. The time perhaps for the solution of the question [of whether or not to continue the relationship between the Smithsonian and the federal government] has not yet arrived although it is important that it should be agitated.

Presidential address to the National Academy of Sciences, April 21, 1876, in Arthur P. Molella, et al., eds., *A Scientist in American Life: Essays and Lectures of Joseph Henry* (Washington, D.C., 1980), p. 136.



Mission

The most prominent idea in my mind is that of stimulating the talent of our country to original research,--in which it has been most lamentably deficient--to pour fresh material on the apex of the pyramid of science, and thus to enlarge its base.

Letter to Joseph Bradley Varnum, Jr., June 22, 1847, in *Henry Papers*, vol. 7, p. 121.

. . .the principal object of the organization is the discovery of new truths, rather than the application of known principles to useful purposes.

Smithsonian Annual Report for 1851, p. 10.

The worth and importance of the Institution is not to be estimated by what it accumulates within the walls of its building, but by what it sends forth to the world. Its great mission is to facilitate the use of implements of research, and to diffuse the knowledge which this use may develop.

Smithsonian Annual Report for 1852, p. 20.

The Institution, to be respected, must maintain a dignified character, and seek rather to direct public opinion than to obtain popularity by an opposite course.

Smithsonian Annual Report for 1852, p. 28.

Nothing apparently can be further from the truth than the idea which was first prevalent in this country that Smithson left his money merely to diffuse practical knowledge among the people of the United States. On the contrary he intended this institution as a monument to his name which should be known of all men, and prized by the student of every branch of literature and science, which should not be restricted to merely spreading abroad the knowledge which already exists, but, above all, should be the means of enlarging the bounds of human thought.

Smithsonian Annual Report for 1853, pp. 7-8.

Indeed, it is an important part of the duty of this Institution to encourage special lines of research into every department of the varied domain of nature.

Smithsonian Annual Report for 1855, pp. 19-20.

It is no part of the plan of the Institution to form a museum merely to attract the attention and gratify the curiosity of the casual visitor to the Smithsonian building, but it is the design to form complete collections in certain branches, which may serve to facilitate the study and increase the knowledge of natural history and geology.

Smithsonian Annual Report for 1855, p. 31.

I wish to give the Institution such a start in the right direction that it cannot deviate from it without attracting the attention of the public.

Letter to John Torrey, January 4, 1856, in *Henry Papers*, vol. 9, p. 303.



. . .it was not intended for educational or immediately practical purposes, but for the encouragement of the study of theoretical principles and the advancement of abstract knowledge.

Smithsonian Annual Report for 1859, p. 17.

. . .the Institution is . . . primarily a foundation for enlarging the boundaries of science by stimulating and assisting the researches of original inquirers, wherever found, and for gratuitously diffusing the results of such researches wherever they may conduce to the intellectual or material interests of men.

Smithsonian Annual Report for 1865, p. 13.

My intention is to push on with increased vigour the active operations of the Institution and to demonstrate conclusively that the essential character of this establishment does not involve the necessity of a large building and a show museum.

Letter to John Peter Lesley, February 11, 1865, in *Henry Papers*, vol. 10, p. 472.

One prominent maxim of the Institution has been "co-operation not monopoly," and another, "in all cases, as far as possible, not to occupy ground especially cultivated by other establishments," or, in other words, not to expend the money of the bequest in doing that for which provision could be obtained through other means.

Smithsonian Annual Report for 1872, p. 18.

Scholarly Publishing

It is chiefly by the publications of the Institution that its fame is to be spread through the world, and the monument most befitting the name of Smithson, erected to his memory.

Smithsonian Annual Report for 1850, p. 10.

Should the government of the United States be dissolved, and the Smithsonian fund dissipated to the winds, the "Smithsonian Contributions to Knowledge" will still be found in the principal libraries of the world, a perpetual monument of the wisdom and liberality of the founder of the Institution, and of the faithfulness of those who first directed its affairs.

Smithsonian Annual Report for 1852, p. 12.

Hence the number of readers and purchasers of a work is generally in the inverse ratio of its intrinsic value; and consequently authors of the highest rank of merit are frequently deterred from giving their productions to the world on account of the pecuniary loss to which the publication would subject them.

Smithsonian Annual Report for 1847, pp. 179-180.

If writers wish to make money by their labors, they must publish novels.

"On the Smithsonian Institution," August 1853, *Proceedings of the Third Session of the American Association for the Advancement of Education* (Newark, N.J., 1854), p. 103.



Smithson Bequest

It was not given in trust to our government to be disposed of for the exclusive benefit of a portion of our own people, or even for that of the whole nation, but in behalf of the general family of mankind, for the benefit of men of all countries and of all times. It was not restricted in effect to the diffusion of a knowledge of old truths, but primarily designed for the extension of the boundaries of thought by the promotion of the discovery of new powers of nature, of new principles and new laws of the universe.

Smithsonian Annual Report for 1867, pp. 13-14.

Smithson devoted his life to abstract science and original research, and there cannot be a reasonable doubt that he used the terms "increase and diffusion of knowledge among men" to imply that the income of his bequest should be devoted to original research in all branches of knowledge susceptible of increase, and the diffusion of the result of this through the press for the benefit of mankind generally.

Smithsonian Annual Report for 1872, p. 13.

Smithsonian Institution Building (the "Castle")

It is certainly too bad that in this civilized age, literature and science should be obliged to make such a sacrifice for the reproduction of the mementos of barbarism.

Letter to Asa Gray, April 3, 1851, in *Henry Papers*, vol. 8, p. 170.



Joseph Henry Quotations-- Personal Philosophy and Opinions

Biographies

. . . I have never had my admiration of any man increased by reading his life.

Letter to Alexander Dallas Bache, July 31, 1855, in *Henry Papers*, vol. 9, p. 271.

Children's Names

I do not hold to the custom of transmitting unpleasant names because they have belonged to a relative. We need no names to keep in remembrance those we honor.

Letter to James Henry, October 30, 1838, in *Henry Papers*, vol. 4, p. 145.

Copyright

The results of the labors of the mind, which form the basis of all human improvement, ought not to be appropriated without remuneration, any more than the labors of the hand or of the machine.

Smithsonian Annual Report for 1871, p. 23.

Duty

If we act conscientiously and faithfully, endeavouring before God to do our duty, the result in the long run cannot be otherwise than good.

Letter to Harriet Henry, May 3, 1847, in *Henry Papers*, vol. 7, p. 98.

. . . my feelings as a man are constantly in antagonism to my duty as secretary of the [Smithsonian] Institution. I am constantly called upon to decide upon, not what ought to be given, but what can be.

Letter to Asa Gray, October 14, 1851, in *Henry Papers*, vol. 8, p. 247.

Economics

Statesmen and merchants however ignore political economy. Its maxims do not accord with the personal advance of the one nor the adventurous spirit of the other.

Letter to Eben N. Horsford, September 30, 1857, in *Henry Papers*, vol. 9, pp. 462-463.



Education

. . .if you succeed in awakening a single undeveloped mind to the importance of knowledge you may console yourself with the reflection that you have not lived in vain.

Letter to [William Leslie Harris], August 1846, in *Henry Papers*, vol. 6, p. 489.

. . .he has not lived in vain who leaves behind him as his successor a child better educated morally, intellectually, and physically than himself.

"The Philosophy of Education," presidential address to the fourth annual session of the American Association for the Advancement of Education, 1854, in Arthur Molella et al., eds., *A Scientist in American Life: Essays and Lectures of Joseph Henry* (Washington, D.C., 1980), p. 74.

Narrow minds indeed think nothing of importance but their own favourite pursuit & what suits not with their taste is folly & absurdity [*sic*]. But more liberal views exclude no branch of science or literature for they all contribute by various means to sweaten [*sic*], to adorn, & to embellish [*sic*] life.

Inaugural address to the Albany Academy, September 11, 1826, in *Henry Papers*, vol. 1, p. 179.

Nothing, in my opinion, can be more preposterous or mischievous than the proposition so frequently advanced that the child should be taught nothing but what it can fully comprehend, and the endeavor in accordance with this to invert the order of nature, and attempt to impart those things which cannot be taught at an early age, and to neglect those which at this period of life the mind is well adapted to receive. By this mode we may indeed produce remarkably intelligent children who will become remarkably feeble men.

"The Philosophy of Education," presidential address to the fourth annual session of the American Association for the Advancement of Education, 1854, in Arthur Molella et al., eds., *A Scientist in American Life: Essays and Lectures of Joseph Henry* (Washington, D.C., 1980), p. 83.

Fame

I am a sensitive man, perhaps nervously so, and though I have not been insensible to the value of true fame, and have striven to connect my name with the history of the science of this country, I have shrunk from notoriety and have neither coveted nor sought popular applause.

Presidential address to the American Association for the Advancement of Education, August 1853, *Proceedings of the Third Session of the American Association for the Advancement of Education* (Newark, N.J., 1854), p. 28.

I doubt the propriety of referring to the life and labors of a living man, in the way of illustration or example. We know not what is before us, and though I now it is true, occupy a conspicuous position, I know not how long it may continue. I desire, therefore, that all that may be said about me may be reserved till I am dead.

Presidential address to the American Association for the Advancement of Education, August 1853, *Proceedings of the Third Session of the American Association for the Advancement of Education* (Newark, N.J., 1854), p. 28.



The desire for present notoriety or for even being remembered by our children has something in it nearly connected with self; but the wish for a far more extended reputation, the desire that our name should pass to after times and be admired by those whose applause is won by no personal recollection, that we may stamp indelibly on the age in which we live some mark of our individual existence is the ambition of a noble mind and far excels that longing which is bounded by the principle of self, however expanded. It is far different from that passion for notoriety with which it is too frequently confounded.

Remarks at the Grave of Joseph Priestley, [July 1874], in Arthur P. Molella, et al., eds., *A Scientist in American Life: Essays and Lectures of Joseph Henry* (Washington, D.C., 1980), p. 118.

Federal Government

There is a remarkably loose state of morality relating to all transactions with the government or with establishments connected with it. The property of the Government is everybody's property, and everyone considers himself entitled to a share; in the quaint language of the Balance, "the public is a goose and he is a fool who does not pluck a feather."

Henry Locked Book, December 2, 1854, in *Henry Papers*, vol. 9, p. 159.

French

. . . a person in Paris who cannot speak this language is in a worse condition than one born deaf and dumb since he has not the advantage of an intimate knowledge of the language of signes [*sic*].

Letter to Harriet Henry, [May 26-June 16], 1837, in *Henry Papers*, vol. 3, p. 354.

Genius

I do not put much trust in particular genius. Give me a mind of general powers not deficient [*sic*] in any one faculty and we have the elements of a great mind.

Introductory remarks for natural philosophy course, [May 28? 1846], in *Henry Papers*, vol. 6, p. 429.

God

God has created man in his own intellectual image, and graciously permitted him to study His modes of operation, and rewards his industry in this line by giving him powers and instruments which affect in the highest degree his material welfare.

Remarks at the Laying of the Cornerstone of the American Museum of Natural History (New York), June 2, 1874, in Arthur P. Molella, et al., eds., *A Scientist in American Life: Essays and Lectures of Joseph Henry* (Washington, D.C., 1980), p. 115.



History

It is a moral obligation that the present should acknowledge its indebtedness to the past, that it should transmit the knowledge which it has received, purified and increased, as a richer inheritance to the future.

Remarks at the Grave of Joseph Priestley, [July 1874], in Arthur P. Molella, et al., eds., *A Scientist in American Life: Essays and Lectures of Joseph Henry* (Washington, D.C., 1980), p. 123.

Human Nature

There is no need of a window in the breast to see the passing thoughts and acting motives of men.

Letter to Alexander Dallas Bache, September 13, 1851, in *Henry Papers*, vol. 8, p. 231.

Labor

What ever is worth possessing must be purchased at the expense of labour. The Gods have placed a price on that which is valuable.

Introductory remarks for natural philosophy course, [May 28? 1846], in *Henry Papers*, vol. 6, p. 430.

Life and Death

How short the space between the two cardinal points of an earthly career! the point of birth and that of death and yet what a universe of wonders is presented to us in our rapid flight through this space.

Letter to Joseph Patterson, April 12, 1878, *Henry Papers*, vol. 10, p. 650.

We are so liable to go astray so beset with adverse influences and so little able to control our own acts, or to direct our own course that the end of a will [*sic*] spent life may justly be compared to the successful termination of a voyage, after having been exposed to the dangers of a stormy Ocean. Our friends have cause to rejoice when we have safely reached the desired haven rather than regret that the perilous voyage was not of longer duration.

Letter to John Torrey, January 4, 1856, in *Henry Papers*, vol. 9, p. 303.

We know not what is in store for us but of this we may be assured that we cannot escape the general lot of humanity--that difficulties and tryals [*sic*] await us but the anticipation of these should not prevent us from enjoying the goods which providence has bestowed on us at the present and when the evil day may come we can live over the past, in memory, and draw a lasting supply of pleasant [*sic*] reflections from this source.

Letter to Harriet Henry, May 3, 1847, in *Henry Papers*, vol. 7, p. 98.



. . .but every think [sic] in life is uncertain, and when we think we are standing on the firmest earth the hidden [sic] fire may be burning beneath us. The sailor boy on the bending mast often lives through the storm while the landsman in fancied security is crushed [sic] with his falling house.

Letter to Harriet Henry, February 3, 1847, in *Henry Papers*, vol. 7, p. 38.

How uncertain are all things of Earth we live among [sic] the dying and yet do not realize as we should do that we are mortal. . . . The awful [sic] change awaits us all. Let the fact be constantly before our minds not to lessen our interest in the affairs of this life but to render us less anxious as to the events of this world whether they turn out for our advantage or not or how long we may be permitted to remain on Earth. Let us put our trust more fully than ever in Him who will order all things for the best who put full reliance on Him.

Letter to Harriet Henry, January 20-21, 1847, in *Henry Papers*, vol. 7, pp. 20-21.

We are called upon to educate ourselves as it were for eternity and an important part of the duty assigned to us for this purpose is that which relates to our connection with the affairs of this life. So far therefore from being paralyzed [sic] in our labours by a realizing sense of the certainty of death and the shortness of life let us rouse ourselves to more strenuous exertions. Let us labor like servants who are certainly and shortly to give an account of their stewardship diligently seeking to know our duty and faithfully and fearlessly strive to do it; constantly mindful of the fact that nothing but purity of heart is acceptable to God and that we are constantly in his presence and known to him are all our thoughts [sic] and intentions however they may be hid from our fellow men.

Letter to Alexander Dallas Bache, October 20, 1846, in *Henry Papers*, vol. 6, p. 525.

Money

Money is power which should not be hoarded but applied to useful purposes not expended in procuring luxures [sic] not in self indulgence but in the advancement of wisdom, virtue and [hence] human development [sic].

Undated note, Box 28, Folder 6a, "Unsorted," Joseph Henry Collection, Record Unit 7001, Smithsonian Institution Archives.

Native Americans

It is a sacred duty which this country owes to the civilized world to collect everything relative to the history, the manners and customs, the physical peculiarities, and, in short, all that may tend to illustrate the character and history of the original inhabitants of North America.

Smithsonian Annual Report for 1857, p. 36.



Politics

Politics in our country, and under any circumstances, is a dangerous and unstable business, and the less we are connected with it the better. When once a man becomes imbued with the spirit of party politics, he becomes unfit for the sober duties of life.

Letter to [James Henry], April 1842, in *Henry Papers*, vol. 5, p. 161.

Religion

The great object of the Bible is the revelation of moral, not physical truth, and that of Physical Science the discovery of physical law, not moral precepts.

Lecture on Geology and Revelation, ca. 1840s, in Arthur P. Molella, et al., eds., *A Scientist in American Life: Essays and Lectures of Joseph Henry* (Washington, D.C., 1980), p. 27.

Again when we pass from the phenomena of life to those of mental and moral emotions, we enter a region of still more absolute mystery, in which our light becomes darkness and we are obliged to bow in profound humiliation, acknowledging that the highest flights of science can only reach the threshold of the temple of faith.

On the Importance of the Cultivation of Science: Letter to the Committee of Arrangements of the Farewell Banquet to Professor Tyndall [February-April 1873], in Arthur P. Molella, et al., eds., *A Scientist in American Life: Essays and Lectures of Joseph Henry* (Washington, D.C., 1980), p. 109.

Success

If I have been successful, I have owed it to this one principle, enthusiastic labor and constant and devoted application to a single object. In pursuing this object, I have sunk the man, and it is by following this course that whatever success I have met with has been obtained.

Presidential address to the American Association for the Advancement of Education, August 1853, *Proceedings of the Third Session of the American Association for the Advancement of Education* (Newark, N.J., 1854), p. 28.

War

. . .next to political meetings I have the most sovereign contempt for the business of soldier playing. . . . The adage "*In time of peace prepare for war*" was of some importance just after the revolution when we might justly dread [*sic*] the attack of a foreign foe but now when we are safe from any sudden invasion and when war is not quite as fashionable [*sic*] as it was the adage does more injury than good. If we are well prepared [*sic*] for war there will be a great temptation to rush into it and indeed had it not been for the delapidated [*sic*] state of our forts a few years ago we might have been precipitated into an unnecessary [*sic*] war with England or France.

Letter to James Henry, July 30 [-August 2], 1844, in *Henry Papers*, vol. 6, p. 126.



. . . I would that it were possible to convert the officers of the armies of the earth into scientific investigators; to employ them in the art of prolonging life, rather than that of shortening it.

Letter to J. H. Lefroy, May 16, 1856, in *Henry Papers*, vol. 9, p. 368.

How strange is the state of feeling which now pervades the public mind. Tender females, who would shrink from the sight of the death of a chicken, and who will shed tears over the ills of an imaginary hero of romance, can now rejoice at the slaughter of thousands of gallant men, and the suffering and death of hundreds of helpless women and children.

Henry Locked Book, June 1, 1862, in *Henry Papers*, vol. 10, p. 271.

The art of destroying life, as well as that of preserving it, calls for the application of scientific principles, and the institution of scientific experiments on a scale of magnitude which would never be attempted in time of peace.

Smithsonian Annual Report for 1862, p. 13.

Washington, D.C.

Washington is a pandemonium [*sic*] in which is congregated all the personifications of all the evil passions of the human character.

Letter to Asa Gray, [April 26, 1853], in *Henry Papers*, vol. 8, p. 438.

The loss of time and effective life to which all are exposed who occupy a position of notoriety in the city of Washington, is truly lamentable; and where this is enhanced by facility of access to gratify mere curiosity, the evil becomes scarcely endurable. Progress in business, under such circumstances, can only be made by an encroachment on the hours usually allotted to rest, and that, too, at the expense of wasted energies and shortened days.

Smithsonian Annual Report for 1852, p. 14.

I have learned to know by experience in Washington that there is a wide difference between [*sic*] what ought to be done and what can be done.

Letter to Benjamin Silliman, Sr., December 2, 1850, in *Henry Papers*, vol. 8, p. 131.

Of all places in the country Washington is I think the worst in which to persue [*sic*] scientific investigations. The constant drudgery and anxiety of an office unfits a man for profound and continuous thought; and as he is under the restraint of the sentiment of the dominant party he finally looses [*sic*] his manly independance [*sic*] and that love of truth which constitutes an honest man.

Letter to Henry Wurtz, July 26, 1861, Henry Wurtz Papers, New York Public Library.



Wisdom

A man may be able to speak 50 languages and at the same time be unable to utter a wise remark of his own in any of these languages.

Introductory remarks for natural philosophy course, [May 28? 1846], in *Henry Papers*, vol. 6, p. 427.

Knowledge to be converted into wisdom must be made our own.

Introductory remarks for natural philosophy course, [May 28? 1846], in *Henry Papers*, vol. 6, p. 427.