

# Life Without Principle Pdf

---

by  
Henry David Thoreau

Powered By



**Pdf Corner**

**First  
Published**

**1854**

# Life Without Principle Pdf

by

**Henry David Thoreau**



This version of Pdf is re-designed

by

**Pdfcorner.com**

© Copyrights Reserved

## **Life without Principle** by Henry David Thoreau

The following is excerpted from the original, much longer text

1. Let us consider the way in which we spend our lives.
2. This world is a place of business. What an infinite bustle! I am awaked almost every night by the panting of the locomotive<sup>1</sup>. It interrupts my dreams. There is no sabbath<sup>2</sup>. It would be glorious to see mankind at leisure for once. It is nothing but work, work, work. I cannot easily buy a blank-book to write thoughts in; they are commonly ruled for dollars and cents. An Irishman, seeing me making a minute in the fields, took it for granted that I was calculating my wages. If a man was tossed out of a window when an infant, and so made a cripple for life, or scared out of his wits by the Indians, it is regretted chiefly because he was thus incapacitated<sup>3</sup> for — business! I think that there is nothing, not even crime, more opposed to poetry, to philosophy, ay, to life itself, than this incessant<sup>4</sup> business.
3. There is a coarse and boisterous<sup>5</sup> money-making fellow in the outskirts of our town, who is going to build a bank-wall under the hill along the edge of his meadow. The powers have put this into his head to keep him out of mischief, and he wishes me to spend three weeks digging there with him. The result will be that he will perhaps get some more money to board, and leave for his heirs<sup>6</sup> to spend foolishly. If I do this, most will commend<sup>7</sup> me as an industrious<sup>8</sup> and hard-working man; but if I choose to devote myself to certain labors which yield more real profit, though but little money, they may be inclined to look on me as an idler<sup>9</sup>. Nevertheless, as I do not need the police of meaningless labor to regulate me, and do not see anything absolutely praiseworthy in this fellow's undertaking any more than in many an enterprise<sup>10</sup> of our own or foreign governments, however amusing it may be to him or them, I prefer to finish my education at a different school.
4. If a man walk in the woods for love of them half of each day, he is in danger of being regarded as a loafer<sup>11</sup>; but if he spends his whole day as a speculator<sup>12</sup>, shearing off those woods and making earth

---

<sup>1</sup> **Locomotive:** The engine that pulls a train forward

<sup>2</sup> **Sabbath:** A day where people rest and avoid work, usually on Saturday.

<sup>3</sup> **Incapacitated:** Unable to work

<sup>4</sup> **Incessant:** without stopping

<sup>5</sup> **Coarse and boisterous:** rude and noisy

<sup>6</sup> **Heirs:** Someone who receives the belongings of a person who has died.

<sup>7</sup> **Commend:** To praise or approve of

<sup>8</sup> **Industrious:** Very hard working, not lazy

<sup>9</sup> **Idler:** A person who is lazy and does not work

<sup>10</sup> **Enterprise:** A difficult project that involves many people and tasks

<sup>11</sup> **Loafer:** A person who does not work hard; an idler

bald before her time, he is esteemed an industrious and enterprising citizen. As if a town had no interest in its forests but to cut them down!

5. Most men would feel insulted if it were proposed to employ them in throwing stones over a wall, and then in throwing them back, merely that they might earn their wages. But many are no more worthily employed now. For instance: just after sunrise, one summer morning, I noticed one of my neighbors walking beside his team, which was slowly drawing a heavy hewn<sup>13</sup> stone swung under the axle, surrounded by an atmosphere of industry, — his day's work begun, — his brow commenced to sweat, — a reproach<sup>14</sup> to all sluggards and idlers, — pausing abreast<sup>15</sup> the shoulders of his oxen, and half turning round with a flourish of his merciful whip, while they gained their length on him. And I thought, Such is the labor which the American Congress exists to protect, — honest, manly toil, — honest as the day is long, — that makes his bread taste sweet, and keeps society sweet, — which all men respect and have consecrated<sup>16</sup>; one of the sacred band, doing the needful but irksome drudgery<sup>17</sup>. Indeed, I felt a slight reproach, because I observed this from a window, and was not abroad and stirring about a similar business. The day went by, and at evening I passed the yard of another neighbor, who keeps many servants, and spends much money foolishly, while he adds nothing to the common stock, and there I saw the stone of the morning lying beside a whimsical<sup>18</sup> structure intended to adorn this Lord Timothy Dexter's premises, and the dignity forthwith departed from the teamster's labor, in my eyes. In my opinion, the sun was made to light worthier toil than this. I may add that his employer has since run off, in debt to a good part of the town, and, after passing through Chancery<sup>19</sup>, has settled somewhere else, there to become once more a patron of the arts.
6. The aim of the laborer should be, not to get his living, to get "a good job," but to perform well a certain work; and, even in a pecuniary<sup>20</sup> sense, it would be economy<sup>21</sup> for a town to pay its laborers so well that they would not feel that they were working for low ends, as for a livelihood merely, but for scientific, or even moral ends. Do not hire a man who does your work for money, but him who does it for love of it.

---

<sup>12</sup> **Speculator:** Someone who invests money, usually in very risky ways

<sup>13</sup> **Hewn:** to be cut into a specific shape

<sup>14</sup> **Reproach:** A disapproving and critical statement

<sup>15</sup> **Abreast:** another way of saying "next to"

<sup>16</sup> **Consecrated:** To make something very holy or important

<sup>17</sup> **Irksome drudgery:** Annoying and burdensome work

<sup>18</sup> **Whimsical:** Playful and amusing

<sup>19</sup> **Chancery:** A government or church office

<sup>20</sup> **Pecuniary:** another way of saying "financial" or "related to money"

<sup>21</sup> **Economy:** cost less money

7. The community has no bribe that will tempt a wise man. You may raise money enough to tunnel a mountain, but you cannot raise money enough to hire a man who is minding *his own* business. An efficient and valuable man does what he can, whether the community pay him for it or not. The inefficient offer their inefficiency to the highest bidder, and are forever expecting to be put into office. One would suppose that they were rarely disappointed.
8. Merely to come into the world the heir of a fortune is not to be born, but to be still-born, rather. To be supported by the charity of friends, or a government pension, — provided you continue to breathe, — by whatever fine synonyms you describe these relations, is to go into the almshouse<sup>22</sup>. On Sundays the poor debtor goes to church to take an account of stock, and finds, of course, that his outgoes have been greater than his income. In church, especially, they go into chancery, make a clean confession, give up all, and think to start again. Thus men will lie on their backs, talking about the fall of man, and never make an effort to get up.
9. God gave the righteous man a certificate entitling him to food and raiment<sup>23</sup>, but the unrighteous man found a *facsimile*<sup>24</sup> of the same in God's coffers<sup>25</sup>, and appropriated<sup>26</sup> it, and obtained food and raiment like the former. It is one of the most extensive systems of counterfeiting that the world has seen. I did not know that mankind were suffering for want of gold. I have seen a little of it. I know that it is very malleable<sup>27</sup>, but not so malleable as wit. A grain of gold will gild a great surface, but not so much as a grain of wisdom.

---

<sup>22</sup> **Almshouse:** A house where poor people live for free, similar to a homeless shelter

<sup>23</sup> **Raiment:** Clothing

<sup>24</sup> **Facsimile:** An exact copy, the term “fax” is short for facsimile

<sup>25</sup> **Coffers:** A box for holding money and other valuable objects

<sup>26</sup> **Appropriated:** To use something for a specific purpose

<sup>27</sup> **Malleable:** able to be shaped, molded, changed, or influenced by something else