

A Calendar of Wisdom

JANUARY

1st January

It is better to know a little of what is really good and worthwhile than a lot of what is mediocre and unnecessary.

Tolstoy

Consider what you have in the smallest chosen library. A company of the wisest and wittiest men that could be picked out of all civil countries in a thousand years have set in best order the results of their learning and wisdom. The men themselves were hid and inaccessible, solitary, impatient of interruption, fenced by etiquette; but the thought which they did not uncover to their bosom friend is here written out in transparent words to us, the strangers of another age. We owe to books those general benefits which come from high intellectual action.

Emerson, *SS*

We are of the ruminating kind, and it is not enough to cram ourselves with a great load of collections; unless we chew them over again, [books] will not give us strength and nourishment.

Locke, 'Of the Conduct of the Understanding'

Be wary lest by reading too many writers and too many different kinds of books your brain becomes confused and addled. If you wish to extract something useful from your reading, you should feed your mind only with those writers of undoubted worth. Read therefore only those books which have been recognized as unquestionably good. And if you should ever feel the urge to turn to any other sort of book, always remember to return to the first kind.

Seneca, *MLL*

Read the best books first, or you may not have a chance to read them at all.

Thoreau, 'A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers'

2nd January

One of the most primitive superstitions is the belief held by the majority of so-called scientists that it is possible to live without faith.

Tolstoy

Throughout the ages people have always yearned to know, or at least to have some idea, about the beginning or the final goal of their earthly existence. Religion has come into being to satisfy this urge, and to illuminate the link which joins all people together as brothers, with everyone coming from one and the same origin, and all moving towards the one universal final goal.

Mazzini, *DM*

True religion is the establishment of a relationship between people and the infinite life that surrounds them – a relationship that links their lives with this infinite life and that acts as a guide to their actions.

Tolstoy

There is only one essential task for every religion, and that is to answer the question: why do I exist and what is my relationship to the infinite world around me? There is not a single religion, from the most sophisticated to the most primitive, which is not based on the establishment of man's relationship with the world around him.

Tolstoy

The essence of every religion is not the divine revelations of particular doctrines (this is what has become known as theology), but the recognition that all our obligations are to be seen as the commandments of God.

After Kant, *CPrR*

To live without faith is to live like an animal.

Tolstoy

3rd January

Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.

Matthew 7:21

The main question of our life, in the short span that we have been given, is only whether or not we do the will of the one who has sent us into this life.

Can we say that this is what we do?

Tolstoy

There is no gulf between heaven and earth, and it would be blasphemous to think that the dwelling-place that God has given us must be forever subjected to evil, self-interest and oppression. The earth is not a place of suffering and redemption, but it is our home and dwelling-place in which we must strive to achieve truth and justice, a yearning that each of us carries around within our souls.

Mazzini, *DM*

I am feeling low and I ask God to help me. But surely I should be serving God rather than him serving me. As soon as we remember that, everything becomes less burdensome.

Tolstoy

Human work must be done honourably and thoroughly, because we are now Men; whether we ever expect to become angels, or were ever slugs, being practically no matter.

Ruskin, *FC*

4th January

Even if we did not wish it to be the case, we cannot help but feel that we are linked to everyone in the entire world. We are linked by industry, by trade, by art, by knowledge and, above all, by the fact that we are all in the same position and that we all share the same relationship with the world around us.

Tolstoy

The construction of this world in which we find ourselves is such that a thousand men working together can produce many times more than the same thousand men working on their own. But this does not make it necessary that the nine hundred and ninety-nine must be the virtual slaves of the one.

George, *SP*

All children of Adam are members of one body. When one member suffers, so do all the others. If you are indifferent to the suffering of others, you do not deserve to be called a human being.

Tolstoy

The life of the individual must be inseparable from the lives of the rest of mankind, for all creation is permeated by a sense of harmony and unity. Just as in the external natural world, so in the life of the spirit, all phenomena are linked closely with one another.

Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*

For as long as we have been aware of it, the whole history of mankind has been marked by its movement towards greater and greater unity. Such unity is achieved by the most varied means – not only by those who work actively for it, but also by those who try to resist it.

Tolstoy

5th January

In a building full of people, someone shouts “fire!”, and everyone starts running about, and scores, hundreds of people are killed. Such is the harm that can clearly arise from the spoken word. But we can do just as much harm when we are not aware of those people who suffer as a result of what we have said.

Tolstoy

A gunshot wound can be healed. But a wound that has arisen from something that has been said can never heal.

Persian proverb

If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body. Behold we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body. Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth. Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity...

General Epistle of James 3:2–6

When you hear people talking about the iniquities of others, do not share in their pleasure. Whenever you hear about such things, do not listen to everything they say: try to forget what you have heard. Listen instead to accounts of good deeds; remember what has been said and spread the word to others. [...]

Eastern wisdom

Be wary of breaking up the unity of people by saying things which turn them one against the other.

Tolstoy

6th January

In order to achieve saintliness there is nothing more important than abstinence. Abstinence must become a habit that is adopted in early life. Whenever that is the case, it becomes a virtue. For those whose virtue has been confirmed in this way, there is nothing they cannot overcome.

Lao-tzu

Glory to the person who does not give in to temptation. God puts everyone to the test: one with wealth, another with poverty. He tests the rich man to see whether he will open his palm to the needy, and the poor man to see whether he can bear his suffering submissively, without complaining.

The Talmud

If, when weighed down by unpleasant tasks, you feel an onrush of anger or irritation, you must withdraw into yourself and stay calm. The more we can practise engaging our willpower to return to a calm state of mind, the greater will be our ability to stay calm.

Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*

However many times you have fallen from grace without succeeding in mastering your passions, do not despair. Every attempt you make to conquer the strength of your passions will make your victory over them that much easier.

Tolstoy

7th January

You must always show kindness to other people. Unless you do this you will be failing in your main duty.

Tolstoy

- 1) Never put off until tomorrow what you can do today.
- 2) Never force someone else to do anything which you can do yourself.
- 3) Pride costs you more than any expenses associated with eating, drinking, accommodation and clothes.
- 4) Stop being tormented by the thought of things which might happen, but which in fact have not happened.
- 5) If you feel angry about something, count up to ten before doing or saying anything. If you still feel angry, count up to a hundred, and then, if necessary, up to a thousand.

After Thomas Jefferson, 'Letter to his son
Thomas Jefferson Smith in 1825'

Do not despise anyone, refrain from any uncharitable judgements of others which you may feel in your heart and from any unkind suspicions regarding your neighbour, and always put the best interpretation on other people's words and actions.

From *Pious Thoughts*

A saintly person does not possess an inflexible heart. He adapts his heart so that it can respond to other people's hearts. He responds to a virtuous person as if he were a virtuous person, and to a sinner as if he were capable of becoming virtuous.

Eastern proverb

8th January

Christian doctrine is so crystal clear that even young children are able to understand its true message. Only those people who wish to call themselves Christian and to be seen as such, but who in reality are not Christian, do not understand it.

Tolstoy

The Buddha said that the man who is beginning to live for the sake of his soul is like the man who takes a light into a dark house; the darkness immediately dissolves. All you need to do is to persist in this way of life and you will become completely enlightened.

Tolstoy

Those people (I am talking about good people who have not been corrupted by the ruling classes) who have been freed from what Christ calls the blindness of wealth, who are satisfied with their daily bread, who ask of their Heavenly Father simply what he provides for little birds, who neither reap nor sow – such people are truly alive, and living the life of the heart more than all those who are obsessed with their desires and absorbed in the problems of this world. That is why you need to look to such people for acts of heroism and self-sacrifice. [...]

Lamennais, *Words of a Believer*

The whole of Christ's teaching is to be found in his last commandment: "Love one another as I have loved you, and therefore everybody will know that, if you love one another, you are my disciples." He does not say "if you have faith in this or that", but "if you love". Faith changes with people's opinions and knowledge; it is associated with time and changes with the passing of time. But love is not temporary; love is invariable and eternal.

Tolstoy

9th January

It is only when we forget all our learning that we begin to know. I do not get a hair's breadth nearer to any natural object so long as I presume I have an introduction to it from some learned man. To conceive of it with a total apprehension I must for the thousandth time approach it as something totally strange.

Thoreau, 'Journal'

Knowledge is like currency. A man may have some right to be proud of possessing it, if he has worked for the gold of it, and assayed it, and stamped it, so that it may be received by all men as true; or earned it fairly as being already assayed; but if he has done none of these things, but only had it thrown in his face by a passer-by, what cause has he to be proud?

John Ruskin, *SV*

It would be better for the human mind not to study at all than to begin studying too soon and too much.

Tolstoy

Read less, study less, think more. Take from teachers and from books only those things you need and want to know.

Tolstoy

10th January

In bringing up children we must remember that we are bringing them up not for life in the present, but for life in the future, for the very best condition of the human race – that is to say, for life in the very best circumstances. Generally, however, parents bring their children up only so that they are fit for the present world, even though it is corrupt. In bringing children up for the future, for a better world, we ourselves will help to ensure a better future for the world.

After Kant, *OE*

In order to bring someone up to be fit for the future, you must have a completely perfect person in mind. Only then will the person you are bringing up become a worthy member of the generation of which they will be a member.

Tolstoy

The entire object of true education is to make people not merely do the right things, but to enjoy the right things – not merely industrious, but to love industry – not merely learned, but to love knowledge – not merely pure, but to love purity – not merely just, but to thirst after justice.

John Ruskin, *Unto this Last*

Religious teaching is the basis of education, yet in our Christian world people teach things in which nobody believes. Children are percipient; they notice this, and disbelieve not only what they are taught, but also those who are teaching them.

Tolstoy

11th January

But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

Matthew 20:25–28

Some of your friends will censure you, some will praise you. Keep the company of those who censure you, and avoid those who praise you.

The Talmud

Try always to eliminate in yourself any wish to dominate others, do not seek glory or praise – this can all lead to the ruin of your soul. Do not allow yourself to think that you possess particular virtues that are lacking in others.

From *Pious Thoughts*

Although the wise man may be strict on himself, he demands nothing of others. He is satisfied with the way he is and never complains to heaven, or blames others for his lot in life. In this lowly position, therefore, he submits to fate. The foolish man, on the other hand, in seeking the good things of this earth, falls into danger.

When an arrow misses its target, the archer blames himself and not someone else. That is how the wise man behaves.

Confucius

Remember all the bad things you have done; this will help you to avoid doing any more. But if you remember the good things you have done, that will prevent you from doing any more.

Tolstoy

12th January

There are people who take it upon themselves to decide for others what their relationship is to God and to the world. And there are people, the vast majority, who give away this right to others and blindly believe what others tell them. Both groups are equally misguided.

Tolstoy

Another sort [of people] there be, who when they hear that all things shall be ordered, all things regulated and settled... will straight give themselves up into your hands, make them and cut them out what religion ye please: there be delights, there be recreations and jolly pastimes, that will fetch the day about from fun to fun, and rock the tedious year as in a delightful dream. What need they torture their heads with that which others have taken so strictly, and so unalterably into their own purveying? These are the fruits, which a dull ease and cessation of our knowledge will bring forth among the people... What a fine conformity would it starch us all into? Doubtless a staunch and solid piece of framework, as any January could freeze together.

Milton, *Areopagitica*

We are like children who repeat by rote the sentences of granddames and tutors and, as they grow older, of the men of talents and character they chance to see – painfully recollecting the exact words they spoke; afterwards, when they come into the point of view which those had who uttered these sayings, they understand them, and are willing to let the words go; for, at any time, we can use words which are as good when occasion comes.

Emerson, *SR*

A man may make use of any tradition handed down to him from the wise and saintly men of the past, but he himself must use his reason to verify everything that is handed down, and to be ready to accept one thing, but reject another.

Tolstoy

13th January

Who is a good person? A good person is only someone who has faith. But what is faith? Faith is when one's will is in harmony with one's conscience, and with universal reason.

Chinese Buddhism

One thing is necessary: to give oneself up to God. Look after things that concern you and leave it to God to unravel the knots of the world and its problems. There may be annihilation, there may be immortality; what will be, will be. What will be, will be for the good. In order to travel along life's path to the end, all we need to do is have faith in what is good.

Amiel, *PJ*

It is said that the last day will be a universal day of judgement when the good Lord will be wrathful. But nothing can come from a God that is good except goodness. Do not be afraid: the end will be full of joy.

However many different faiths there are on this earth, there is only one true faith: that God is love. And there is nothing that can come from love, apart from good.

Persian proverb

In order to truly believe, you have to cultivate faith. And in order to cultivate faith, you need to act accordingly.

The essence of acts of faith lies not in great deeds, but in trivial, insignificant acts performed exclusively for God.

Pascal said that we all have to "die alone". And the only true life is the life you live alone, before God rather than before other people.

Tolstoy

14th January

[...] If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar; for he that loveth not his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.

First Epistle of John, (taken from Chapter 4)

If a man cannot forgive his brother, he does not love him. True love is limitless, and there is no end to the number of insults which love, if it is genuine, cannot forgive.

Tolstoy

To love someone whom we like does not mean to love. Love is only true love when you love in someone the same God who is in you. With such a love you love not only those close to you, not only those who love you, but unpleasant and unkind people who hate you. In order to love such people, you need to remember that the person you are dealing with loves himself as much as you love yourself, and that he has within him the same God as you have within you. If you remember that, you will know what your attitude towards him should be. And if you know that then you will love him, and if you love him in that way, then such a love will bring you more joy than love for those who love you.

Tolstoy

Love is not a basic principle of our life; it is a consequence, not a cause. The cause of love is the awareness of the God, the divine principle, that is within us. Such awareness demands love; such awareness gives rise to love.

Tolstoy

15th January

The fundamental significance of Christ's teaching lies in the establishment of an immediate bond between man, the son of God, and God the father.

Tolstoy

What is the essence of the character of Christ, you ask. I reply that it is to be found in his belief in the greatness of the human soul. He was able to see in man the reflection and the image of God, and therefore he loved man unconditionally, whatever sort of person he was, and whatever kind of life he lived. Christ was able to see through the outer material shell of people, so that the body disappeared. He could see through the fine clothes of the rich and the rags of the poor into the souls of people; and there, in the darkness of ignorance and amid the dark stains of sin, he could discern the developing signs of strength and perfection, of a fundamentally spiritual and immortal being. In the lowest and most depraved of people he could discern a being who could become transformed into an angel of light.

Channing, 'The Character of Christ'

Knowledge of God can come either through the intellect or through a moral awareness that is based on faith. Intellectual knowledge is unreliable and vulnerable to dangerous error. Moral knowledge, on the other hand, ascribes to God only those characteristics which demand that people behave morally.

After Kant, *RWL*

You should fear, above all, anything that stands between you and God – the spirit that dwells within you.

Tolstoy

16th January

We must pay the greatest attention to our public affairs; we should be prepared to change our minds, to renounce our old views and adopt new ones. We should cast prejudice aside and argue with a completely open mind. A sailor who raises the same sail, regardless of changes in the direction of the wind, will never reach his port.

George, *SP*

If they wish to improve their relationship, workers and capitalists must set to one side the ancient Mosaic law “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth”.

Lucy Mallory

So long as people stay as they are, no reform, however powerful, can correct an evil. Therefore the correction of an evil cannot come about through any change in the form of our life, but through the spread of goodness and rationality.

Tolstoy

We need simply and directly to accept the teaching of Christ so that the terrible deception in which we all live, and which is to be found in each of us, becomes clear.

Tolstoy

17th January

People can be free in their external lives only to the extent that they have already been freed in their inner lives.

Herzen, 'Letters to an Old Comrade'

The dreamer can often define the future correctly, but he does not wish to wait for it to arrive; he wants to bring it closer by his own efforts. Something which, when left to itself, will take thousands of years to come about, he wishes to see completed within his own lifetime.

Lessing, *EHR*

It would be good if wisdom were able to be poured from one person who has an abundance of it into another who lacks it entirely, just as water can be poured out through wool from one vessel into another until the amount is equal. But the trouble is that in order to be able to accept someone else's wisdom, you need first of all to work upon yourself.

Tolstoy

If you are able to teach someone to behave in an upright way and yet do not do so, you will lose a brother.

Chinese wisdom

Do what you have to in your life, perfecting and improving your soul, and you can be sure that it is only by doing this that you will be contributing to the general welfare of everybody in the most fruitful way.

Tolstoy

18th January

A scholar is someone who acquires great knowledge from the books he has read. An educated person is someone who has mastered the most widespread current knowledge and scientific methods. An enlightened person is someone who understands the meaning of his life.

Tolstoy

Ever since the beginning of mankind, there have been teachers who have identified what it is people should know. As a result, every individual and everyone everywhere has learnt their purpose in life, and therefore their true worth. It is only when we are armed with this knowledge that we can assess the significance and worth of every other branch of knowledge. [...]

Tolstoy

The most common phenomenon of our time is to see people who know a mass of unnecessary things and who consider themselves to be scholarly, educated and enlightened wallowing in the most profound ignorance; not only do they not know the meaning of their lives, but they take pride in their ignorance. And, on the other hand, it is a no less common phenomenon to meet many poorly educated and illiterate people who know nothing about the periodic table, parallaxes or the characteristics of radium, yet who know the meaning of their lives and who are not proud of this, but who merely feel sorry for those so-called enlightened people who, with their boundless self-assurance, make a virtue out of their ignorance.

Tolstoy

19th January

The life of society can only be improved by the self-denial of the individual.

Tolstoy

They say that one swallow does not make a summer. But is it not precisely because one swallow does not make a summer that the swallow which cannot sense the onset of summer but simply waits for it to arrive will never fly? If you had to wait for every bud to blossom and every blade of grass to grow, then you would never have a summer. In just the same way, in the process of establishing God's kingdom on earth we don't need to think whether we are the first or the thousandth swallow.

Tolstoy

Heaven and earth are eternal. They are eternal because they do not exist for themselves; that is why they are eternal.

In just the same way an upright and saintly man renounces himself and thereby becomes eternal. And, in becoming eternal, he also becomes a mighty and powerful individual and is able to achieve everything he needs to achieve.

Lao-tzu

A person's perfection is measured by the extent to which he has liberated himself from his own individual personality. The more he is able to do this, the closer he will be to perfection.

Tolstoy

All attempts to improve one's life are fruitless without the idea of sacrifice. Such attempts merely make any improvement impossible.

Tolstoy

20th January

When you wonder what will happen to your soul after death, it is impossible not to think about what it was doing before you were born. If you are going somewhere, that must mean you have come from somewhere. It is the same with life: if you have come into this life, then you must have come from somewhere. If your life is going to continue after your death, then you must have been alive before you were born.

Tolstoy

If we live a good life, then we are happy in the here and now, and we do not think about what will happen after our death. If, however, we should think about death, then, judging by how good we find life now, we believe it will continue like this after death. It is much more consoling and correct to believe that God is good – that he has done and is doing the very best for us – than to believe in all the blessings of paradise.

Tolstoy

You must not wonder what might happen when you die, but you must try in this life to do the will of the one who has sent us – something we know in our hearts as well as in our minds.

Tolstoy

21st January

Neither let mistakes and wrong directions – of which every man, in his studies and elsewhere, falls into many – discourage you. There is precious instruction to be got by finding that we are wrong.

Carlyle, ‘Letter to a Young Man’, 13th March 1843

Keep your heart clear of other people’s worries, and do not meddle in things that do not concern you. Try rather to concentrate on improving yourself and on making progress along the path towards perfection.

From Pious Thoughts

Whenever you have done something wrong, however minor, never think it is something trivial. It is wrong to say to yourself “I’ve done that now, and I won’t do it again”, for you will find it difficult to refrain from repeating doing something you have already done once. And if you have done some good deed, never say to yourself “that’s a tiny matter; I can easily do that whenever I want to”. Don’t think or say such things. Even a small good deed will always give you strength to live a good life, whereas a bad deed will diminish such strength.

Tolstoy

We feel that our most important task on earth is to do something visible: to build a house, plough a field, feed cattle, or pick fruit etc., whereas it is not so important to work on something invisible, such as one’s soul; it is just as easy not to do it as to do it. And yet, it is only work of this kind – the work on your soul, so that you can become better and kinder with each day that passes – which is real and worthwhile; all other work of the visible kind is only useful if our main work is concerned with our souls.

Tolstoy

22nd January

There are no circumstances under which murder cannot be the clearest and most primitive violation of God's law, as reflected in all religious teachings and in people's conscience.

Tolstoy

What is military service? I will tell you. As soon as a young man has come of age and grown strong, he is taken away to some reception room where he is ordered to undress. He is then physically examined, and then ordered to swear on the cross and the New Testament that he will obey all orders given to him by his superiors and will kill all those he is told to kill. When he has done this – something which is against reason, conscience and even the letter of Christ's law as it is expressed in the Gospels – he will be put in a uniform, given a gun, taught how to shoot and sent off to kill people – people who are his brothers. Those people whom he has been ordered to kill have never done him any wrong, and, although he has never seen them, he shoots them because he has sworn on the New Testament that that is what he will do – the very same New Testament in which it is written that one should never swear false oaths and never kill one's brother, or even be angry with him.

Tolstoy

Military service generally depraves people, placing those who enter into it in a condition of complete idleness – a total absence, that is to say, of rational and useful labour, together with freedom from the normal obligations of everyday human existence. The only important thing is the artificial honour of their regiment, their uniform and their badge; they are given unlimited power over other human beings while, at the same time, remaining in a state of servile obedience to their superior commanders. [...]

Tolstoy

23rd January

[...] When an angry person gets into a fight or starts hitting someone weaker than himself such as a small child or a woman, or even a dog or a horse, he is demonstrating his weakness rather than his strength.

Tolstoy

The Roman sage Seneca said that whenever you feel the onset of anger, the best way to contain it is simply to be quite still and do nothing: don't walk, or move, or say anything. If you allow your body to do whatever it wants, the anger inside you will simply increase. [...]

Tolstoy

One can understand why an acquisitive and grasping person should wish to offend someone else: he wants to possess what they have, so that he himself can become richer; he wrongs others for his own advantage. Yet an evil man does wrong to other people without any advantage to himself. More than that: in doing wrong to others, he does wrong to himself.

After Socrates

The person whose anger knows no limits, the person whose anger twines around him like ivy, will shortly find himself in a position in which only his most inveterate enemy would place him.

Buddhist saying

When a small child sees two people having an ill-tempered argument he is not interested in who is right and who is wrong, but runs away from them in sorrow, considering them both equally to blame. And in this he is always more in the right than either of them.

Tolstoy

24th January

Narrow is the path leading to life, and only a few people will be able to find it. I say only a few, because the majority of people choose the broad path – the path which everyone follows. But the true path is a narrow one, wide enough only for one person. And in order to find this path, you have to follow single individuals rather than the crowd: individuals such as the Buddha, Confucius, Socrates and Christ – the very people who, one after the other, have laid down the same narrow path for themselves and for everyone else to follow.

Tolstoy

There are only three kinds of people: the first have found God and serve him; they lead rational, contented lives. The second kind have not found God and are not even looking for him; they lead irrational, unhappy lives. The third kind have not found God, but they are seeking him; such people live rational lives, but they are unhappy.

Pascal, *Thoughts*

Wheresoever the search after truth begins, there life begins; wheresoever that search ceases, there life ceases.

Ruskin, 'The Deteriorative Power of Conventional Art over Nations'

If a person seeks wisdom, he is clever, but if he thinks he has found it, then he is mad.

Persian proverb

25th January

There are certain items of knowledge which everybody needs to know. Until people have assimilated such knowledge, all other knowledge will be harmful.

Tolstoy

Turn your gaze away from the world of lies and deceit, and do not trust your feelings: they lie. You should look rather for what is eternal in yourself, in the impersonal you.

Buddhist proverb

It is better to know a little about the rules of living than to learn all kinds of useless scientific subjects. Knowledge of useless scientific subjects will only subject you to the temptation of pride and will prevent you from understanding the necessary rules of living.

Tolstoy

Be afraid not of ignorance, but of false knowledge. It is better to know nothing than to consider something that is actually false to be true. It is better to know nothing about heaven than to see it as something solid, and God as someone up there sitting in it. [...]

Tolstoy

26th January

Is there not something exceptionally wrong with the fact that we can sit at a feast laughing away with an abundance of food in front of us, while at the same time we can hear people weeping as they walk along the street? Yet not only do we ignore their weeping, we find them irritating and call them frauds. Frauds, you say? But surely people are not going to pretend they are something that they're not, simply for the sake of a piece of bread, are they? But even if we think that is the case, then it is all the more incumbent on us to take pity on them and give them whatever they need. But if we don't want to give them anything, then at least we must not insult them.

St John Chrysostom, 'Paschal Homily'

Nowhere is the cruelty of rich people so evident as in their attempts to give alms.

Tolstoy

A rich man has a house of fifteen rooms for three people, but he is unable to welcome a beggar into his house to warm himself and spend the night. A peasant has a tiny hut with a single room for seven people, but he willingly welcomes a stranger into his hut.

Tolstoy

All things are literally better, lovelier and more beloved for the imperfections which have been divinely appointed, that the law of human life may be Effort, and the law of human judgment, Mercy.

John Ruskin, SV