

# **AFFIRMATIONS**

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Affirmations by Havelock Ellis

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**HAVELOCK ELLIS**

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BY  
HAVELOCK ELLIS

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## PREFACE.

THERE are at least two ways of looking at books and at the personalities books express. In its chief but rarer aspect literature is the medium of art, and as such can raise no ethical problems. Whatever morality or immorality art may hold is quiescent, or lifted into an atmosphere of radiant immortality where questioning is irrelevant. Of the literature that is all art we need not even speak, unless by chance we too approach it as artists, trying to grasp it by imaginative insight. In literature, as elsewhere, art should only be approached as we would approach Paradise, for the sake of its joy. It would be well, indeed, if we could destroy or forget all that has ever been written about the world's great books, even if it were once worth while to write those books about books. How happy, for instance, the world might be if there were no literature about the Bible, if Augustine and Aquinas and Calvin and thousands of

smaller men had not danced on it so long, stamping every page of it into mire, that now the vision of a single line, in its simple sense, is almost an effort of inspiration. All my life long I have been casting away the knowledge I have gained from books about literature, and from opinions about life, and coming to literature itself or to life itself, a slow and painful progress towards that Heaven of knowledge where a child is king.

But there is another kind of literature, a literature which is not all art—the literature of life. Literature differs from design or music by being closer to life, by being fundamentally not an art at all, but merely the development of ordinary speech, only rising at intervals into the region of art. It is so close to life that largely it comes before us much as the actual facts of life come before us. So that while we were best silent about the literature of art, sanctified by time and the reverence of many men, we cannot question too keenly the literature of life. In this book I deal with questions of life as they are expressed in literature, or as they are suggested by literature. Throughout I am discussing morality as revealed or disguised by literature. I may not care, indeed, to pervert my subjects in order to emphasise my opinions, but I frankly take my subjects chiefly on those sides which suit my own pleasure, and I select



them solely because they do that so well. I use them as the ancient device of the stalking-horse was used, to creep up more closely to the game that my soul loves best.

So far as possible I dwell most on those aspects of my subjects which are most questionable. It was once brought against me that I had a predilection for such aspects. Assuredly it is so. If a subject is not questionable it seems to me a waste of time to discuss it. The great facts of the world are not questionable; they are there for us to enjoy, or to suffer, in silence, not to talk about. Our best energies should be spent in attacking and settling questionable things that so we may enlarge the sphere of the unquestionable—the sphere of real life—and be ready to meet new questions as they arise. It is only by dealing with the questionable aspects of the world that criticism of life can ever have any saving virtue for us. It is waste of life to use literature for pawing over the unquestionable. Even a healthy dog, having once ascertained the essential virtue of a bone, contentedly eats it, or buries it.

And yet, it may well be, there is a time for affirming the simple eternal facts of life, a time, even, when those simple eternal facts have drifted so far from us that we count them also questionable. The present moment has seemed to me a fitting one to set a few such affirmations in

order. The century now nearly over has performed many dirty and laborious tasks; it has had to organise its own unwieldiness, to cleanse its Augean stables of the filth it has itself deposited, to pull down the buildings it has itself erected. When we witness such work carried out—blunderingly, it may be, but yet, we thought, humbly—we may well point out what splendid fellows these modest, begrimed toilers really were, what useful and noble work they were engaged in, how large a promise they bear for the future. That was my own point of view. But the case is altered when these yet unwashed toilers rise up around us in half-intoxicated jubilation over the triumphs of their own little epoch, well assured that there never was such an age or such a race since the world began. Then we may well pause. It is time to recall the simple eternal facts of life. It is time to affirm the existence of those verities which are wrought into our very structure everywhere and always, and in the face of which the paltry triumphs of an "era" fall back into insignificance.

Yet every man must make his own affirmations. The great questions of life are immortal, only because no one can answer them for his fellows. I claim no general validity for my affirmations. It has been well said that certain books possess a value that is in the ratio of the

spiritual vigour of those who use them, acting as a tonic to the strong, still further dissolving and enfeebling the weakness of the weak. It would be presumptuous to claim any potent and peculiar energy for this book; but the observation is one which a reader may do well always to bear in mind. The final value of any book is not in the beliefs which it may give us or take away from us, but in its power to reveal to us our own real selves. If I can stimulate any one in the search for his own proper affirmations, he and I may well rest content. He is welcome to cast aside mine as the idle conclusions of a dreamer lying in the sunshine. Our own affirmations are always the best. Let us but be sure that they are our own, that they have grown up slowly and quietly, fed with the strength of our own blood and brain. Only with the help of such affirmations can we find a staff to comfort us through the valley of life. It is only when they utter affirmations, one has said, that the wands of the angels blossom.

H. E.

*August 1897.*