

Quotes and Images From Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr.

Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr. - Edited and Arranged by David Widger

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Produced by David Widger

QUOTES AND IMAGES FROM O. W. HOLMES, SR.

OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES

Editor's Note

This is the physician and poet, not his son of the same name who was a Supreme Court Justice and famous in his own right. Very early on Dr. Holmes became my mentor and guide in the philosophy of medicine. Though his world-wide fame was based on his prose and poetry, he was an eminent leader in medicine. Many--too many years ago I would often assign Holmes' "Medical Essays" to a medical student whose sharp edges of science needed some rounding-off with a touch of humanity. I have no longer the privilege of assigning anything to anybody, yet encourage any of you, especially any who may be physicians, to read the thoughts of a

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family doctor of the early 1800's.

A misprint kills a sensitive author

Absolute, peremptory facts are bullies

Advised every literary man to have a profession.

Afraid of books who have not handled them from infancy

Age and neglect united gradually

Agreed on certain ultimata of belief

Algebraic symbols of minds which have grown too weak

All his geese are swans

All men are bores, except when we want them

All men love all women

All the forms of moral excellence, except truth

All want to reach old age and grumble when they get it

And now we two are walking the long path in peace together

Another privilege of talking is to misquote

Arc in the movement of a large intellect

As I understand truth

As to clever people's hating each other

As a child, he should have tumbled about in a library

Asked Solon what made him dare to be so obstinate

Assume a standard of judgment in our own minds

At the mercy of every superior mind

Audacious self-esteem, with good ground
for it

Automatic and involuntary actions of
the mind

Babbage's calculating machine

Be very careful to whom you trust one
of these keys

Beautiful effects from wit,--all the
prismatic colors

Been in the same precise circumstances
before

Behave like men and gentlemen about it,
if you know how.

Beliefs are rooted in human wants and
weakness, and die hard

Bells which small trades-people connect
with their shop-doors

Better for mankind,--and all the worse
for the fishes

Better too few words, from the woman we
love

Bewitching cup of self-quackery

Bill which will render pockets a
superfluity in your next suit

Blank checks of intellectual bankruptcy

Bowing and nodding over the music

Brain often runs away with the heart's
best blood

Brilliant flashes--of silence!

Brute beasts of the intellectual domain

Bury in it beliefs, doubts, dreams,
hopes, and terrors

But we must sail, and not drift, nor
lie at anchor.

But it was in talking of Life that we
came most nearly together

Called an old man for the first time

Character is distinctly shown at the age of four months.

Cigar

Clairvoyance which sees into things without opening them

Code of finalities is a necessary condition of profitable talk

Cold shower-bath the world furnishes gratis

Comfort is essential to enjoyment

Commerce is just putting his granite foot upon them

Common sense, as you understand it.

Common sense was good enough for him

Compare the racer with the trotter

Conceit is just a natural thing to human minds

Conceit has the virtue of making them cheerful

Conclusion that he or she is really dull

Conflicting advice of all manner of officious friends

Consciousness of carrying a "settler" in the form of a fact

Controversy

Conversation which is suggestive rather than argumentative

Conversational fungi spring up most luxuriantly

Conversational bully

Conversational blank checks or counters

Conversational soprano

Creative action is not voluntary at all

Crippled souls

Crow with a king-bird after him

Cut your climate to your constitution

Dangerous subjects

Demand for intellectual labor is so enormous

Did I believe in love at first sight?

Didn't know Truth was such an invalid

Differ on the fundamental principles

Dishwater from the washings of English dandyism

Disputing about remainders and fractions

Do wish she would get well--or something

Do you know how important good jockeying is to authors?

Do you ever wonder why poets talk so much about flowers?

Do not be bullied out of your common sense by the specialist

Don't make your moral staple consist of the negative virtues

Don't believe any man ever talked like that in this world

Don't begin to pry till you have got the long arm on your side

Don't ever think the poetry is dead in an old man

Don't be in a hurry to choose your friends

Doomed to the pangs of an undeceived self-estimate

Dullest of teachers is the one who does not know what to omit

Dulness is not commonly a game fish

Earned your money by the dose you have taken

Easier to dispute it than to disprove
it

Easier to say this than to prove it

Educational factory

Elysian abandonment of a huge recumbent
chair.

Every person's feelings have a
front-door and a side-door

Extra talent does sometimes make people
jealous

Facts always yield the place of honor,
in conversation

Fall silent and think they are thinking

Few, if any, were ruined by drinking

Flash terms for words which truly
characterize their objects.

Fortune is the measure of intelligence

Fortune had left her, sorrow had
baptized her

Friendship authorizes you to say
disagreeable things

Gambling with dice or stocks

Gambling, on the great scale, is not
republican

Generalize the disease and
individualize the patient

Generally ruined before they became
drunkards

Genius in an essentially common person
is detestable

Gift of seeing themselves in the true
light

Give it an intellectual shake and hold
it up to the light

Give us the luxuries of life

Good for nothing until they have been
long kept and used

Good feeling helps society to make
liars of most of us

Good Americans, when they die, go to
Paris

Got his hand up, as a pointer lifts his
forefoot

Governed, not by, but according to laws

Grave without a stone where nothing but
a man is buried

Great silent-moving misery puts a new
stamp on us

Grow we must, if we outgrow all that we
love

Grow old early, if you would be old
long

Habit is a labor-saving invention

Habits are the crutches of old age

Half knowledge dreads nothing but whole
knowledge

Half-censure divided between the
parties

Hard it is for some people to get out
of a room

He did not know so much about old age
then as he does now

He that has once done you a kindness

He who is carried by horses must deal
with rogues

Height of art to conceal art

Her breathing was somewhat hurried and
high, or thoracic

Here lies buried the soul of the
licentiate Pedro Garcias

Hire logic, in the shape of a lawyer

Hold their outspread hands over your
head

Holes in all her pockets

Hoped he did deserve a little abuse
occasionally

Hopelessly dull discourse acts
inductively

How long will school-keeping take to
kill you?

Hung with moss, looking like bearded
Druids

Hydrostatic paradox of controversy

I always believed in life rather than
in books

I always break down when folks cry in
my face

I allow no "facts" at this table

I show my thought, another his

I tell my secrets too easily when I am
downhearted.

I love horses

I think I have not been attacked enough
for it

I never think I have hit hard unless it
rebounds

I replied with my usual forbearance

I am my own son, as it seems to me

I had not thought love was ever meant
for me.

I hate books

I have lived by the sea-shore and by
the mountains

I have taken all knowledge to be my
province

If so and so, we should have been this
or that

If they have run as well as they knew
how!

If I thought I should ever see the
Alps!

Il faut ne pas BRUTALISER la machine

In what direction we are moving

Incipit Allegoria Senectutis.

Infinite ocean of similitudes and analogies

Insanity is often the logic of an accurate mind overtaken

Insanity

Intellectual companions can be found easily

Is this the mighty ocean?--is this all?

It is by little things that we know ourselves

It is pleasant to be foolish at the right time

Judge men's minds by comparing with mine

Keep his wit in the background

Key to this side-door

Knowledge and timber only useful when seasoned

La main de fer sous le gant de velours

Laid the egg of the Reformation which Luther hatched

Laughs at times at the grand airs
"Science" puts on

Law of the road with regard to handsome faces

Leading a string of my mind's daughters to market

Leap at a single bound into celebrity

Learn anything twice as easily as in my earlier days

Leave your friend to learn unpleasant truths from his enemies

Lecturer is public property

Let us cry!

Liability of all men to be elected to
public office

Life would be nothing without
paper-credit

Life is maintained by the respiration
of oxygen and of sentiment

Like taking the cat in your lap after
holding a squirrel

Listen to what others say about
subjects you have studied

Little great man

Little muscle which knows its
importance

Little narrow streaks of specialized
knowledge

Live on the reputation of the
reputation they might have made

Living in a narrow world of dry habits

Logic

Logicians carry the surveyor's chain
over the track

Long illness is the real vampyrism

Look through the silvered rings of the
arcus senilis!

Love must be either rich or rosy

Love is sparingly soluble in the words
of men

Love-capacity is a congenital endowment

Lying is unprofitable

Made up your mind to do when you ask
them for advice

Man of family

Man who means to be honest for a
literary pickpocket

Man is father to the boy that was

Man's and a woman's dusting a library

Man's first life-story shall clean him
out, so to speak

Mathematical fact

May doubt everything to-day if I will
only do it civilly

Meaningless blushing

Mechanical invention had exhausted
itself

Memory is a net

Men that know everything except how to
make a living

Men grow sweet a little while before
they begin to decay

Men of facts wait their turn in grim
silence

Men who have found new occupations when
growing old

Men that it weakens one to talk with an
hour

Men are fools, cowards, and liars all
at once

Might have hired an EARTHQUAKE for less
money!

Moralist and occasional sermonizer

Most of our common, working beliefs are
probabilities

Moved as if all her articulations were
elbow-joints

Much ashamed of some people for
retaining their reason

Must not read such a string of verses
too literally

Must sail sometimes with the wind and
sometimes against it

Must be weaned from his late suppers
now

Napoleon's test

Nature dresses and undresses them

Nature, who always has her pockets full
of seeds

Nearest approach to flying that man has
ever made

Neither make too much of flaws or
overstatements

Never forget where they have put their
money

No families take so little medicine as
those of doctors

No fresh truth ever gets into a book

No man knows his own voice

Nobody is so old he doesn't think he
can live a year

None of my business to inquire what
other persons think

Nutritious diet of active sympathetic
benevolence

Oblivion as residuary legatee

Oblivion's Uncatalogued Library

Odious trick of speech or manners must
be got rid of.

Oh, so patient she is, this
imperturbable Nature!

Old Age

Old age appear as a series of personal
insults and indignities

Old jokes are dynamometers of mental
tension

One very sad thing in old friendships

One whose patients are willing to die
in his hands

One doesn't like to be cruel,--and yet
one hates to lie

One that goes in a nurse may come out
an angel

One can generally tell these wholesale
thieves easily enough

Open patches where the sun gets in and
goes to sleep

Oracle

Original, though you have uttered it a
hundred times

Ought to produce insanity in every
well-regulated mind

Our brains are seventy-year clocks

Overrate their own flesh and blood

Painted there by reflection from our
faces

Passion never laughs

People in the green stage of millionism

People that make puns are like wanton
boys

Person is really full of information,
and does not abuse it

Personal incidents that call up single
sharp pictures

Physical necessity to talk out what is
in the mind

Picket-guard at the extreme outpost

Plagiarism

Pluck survives stamina

Poem must be kept and used, like a
meerschaum, or a violin

Poetry, instead of making one other
heart happy

Poetry of words is quite as beautiful
as that of sentences

Poor creature that does not often
repeat himself

Poverty is evidence of limited capacity

Power of human beings is a very

strictly limited agency

Power of music

Pretensions of presumptuous ignorance

Pride, in the sense of contemning others

Probabilities

Project a principle full in the face of obvious fact!

Provincial conceit, which some of us must plead guilty to.

Pseudo-science

Pseudological inanity

Public itself, which insists on being poisoned

Pun is prima facie an insult

Put coppers on the railroad-tracks

Qu'est ce qu'il a fait? What has he done?

Quackery and idolatry are all but immortal

Question everything

Racing horses are essentially gambling implements

Rapidity with which ideas grow old in our memories

Rather meet three of the scowlers than one of the smilers.

Rather longer than usual dressing that morning

Regained my freedom with a sigh

Religious mental disturbances

Remarkably intelligent audience

Remarks like so many postage-stamps

Returning thanks after a dinner of many courses

Ribbon which has strangled so many
false pretensions

Sad thing to be born a sneaking fellow

Saddle-leather is in some respects even
preferable

Saint may be a sinner that never got
down to "hard pan"

Saturation-point of each mind differs
from that of every other

Saying one thing about it and believing
another

Scientific certainty has no spring in
it

Scientific knowledge

Second story projecting

See if the ripe fruit were better or
worse

Self-assertion, such as free suffrage
introduces

Self-love is a cup without any bottom

Self-made men?

Self-unconsciousness of genius

Sense of SMELL

Sentenced to capital punishment for the
crime of living

"Sentimentality," which is sentiment
overdone

"Settler" in the form of a fact or a
revolver

Several false premises

Shake the same bough again

She who nips off the end of a brittle
courtesy

She always laughs and cries in the
right places

Shut out, not all light, but all the
light they do not want

Shy of asking questions of those who
know enough to destroy

SIN has many tools, but a lie is the
handle which fits them all

Single combats between dead authors and
living housemaids

Singular inability to weigh the value
of testimony

Six persons engaged in every dialogue
between two

Slow to accept marvellous stories and
many forms of superstition

Small potatoes always get to the
bottom.

Smiling at present follies

So long as a woman can talk, there is
nothing she cannot bear

So much woman in it,--muliebrity, as
well as femineity

So much must be pardoned to humanity

Society is a strong solution of books

Society of Mutual Admiration

Sold his sensibilities

Some people that think everything
pitiable is so funny

Some people think that truth and gold
are always to be washed for

Somebody had been calling him an old
man

Something she is ashamed of, or ought
to be

Something better than flowers; it is a
seed-capsule

Somewhere,--somewhere,--love is in
store for them

Stages of life

Struggle with the ever-rising mists of

delusion

Stupidity often saves a man from going
mad

Style is the man

Sudden conviction that I had seen it
somewhere

Takes very little to spoil everything
for writer, talker, lover

Talk about those subjects you have had
long in your mind

Talk, to me, is only spading up the
ground for crops of thought

Talk without words is half their
conversation

Talkers who have what may be called
jerky minds

Talking with a dull friend affords
great relief

Talking is like playing on the harp

Talking is one of the fine arts

Talking shapes our thoughts for us

Tears that we weep inwardly with
unchanging features

Temptation of money and fame is too
great for young people

Tepid and unstimulating expression of
enthusiasm

Terrible smile

Thanklessness of critical honesty

That great procession of the UNLOVED

The house is quite as much the body we
live in

The schoolmistress had tried life, too

The Amen! of Nature is always a flower

The race that shortens its weapons
lengthens its boundaries

The year eighteen hundred and ever-so-few

The way to argue down a vice is not to
tell lies about it

Their business is not a matter of
sympathy, but of intellect

There is no elasticity in a
mathematical fact

There is a higher law in grammar, not
to be put down

There is almost always at least one key
to this side-door

Think only in single file front this
day forward

Think of the griefs that die unspoken!

Third vowel as its center

This is the shortest way,--she said

This is one of those cases in which the
style is the man

Those who ask your opinion really want
your praise

Time is a fact

To trifle with the vocabulary

To pay up, to own up, and to shut up,
if beaten

Too late!---- "It might have been."----
Amen!

Travellers change their guineas, but
not their characters

Triumph of the ciphering hand-organ

True state of creative genius is allied
to reverie, or dreaming

Truth must roll, or nobody can do
anything with it

Truth is only safe when diluted

Truth's sharp corners get terribly
rounded

Truths a man carries about with him are

his tools

Turn over any old falsehood

Unadorned and in plain calico

Undertakers

Unpacks and unfolds incidental
illustrations

Unpretending mediocrity is good

Virtually old when it first makes its
appearance

Virtue passed through the hem of their
parchment

Virtues of a sporting man

Vulgarism of language

Wait awhile!

Walls of that larger Inquisition which
we call Civilization

Want of ideas, want of words, want of
manners

We die out of houses, just as we die
out of our bodies

We always compare ourselves with our
contemporaries.

We are all theological students

We carry happiness into our condition

We don't read what we don't like

We never tell our secrets to people
that pump for them.

Wedded, faded away, threw themselves
away

Wedding-ring conveys a right to a key
to this side-door

Weeded their circle pretty well of
these unfortunates

What a satire, by the way, is that
machine

What are the great faults of

conversation?

Whether anything can be conscious of
its own flavor??

Whether gifted with the accident of
beauty or not

While she is silent, Nature is working
for her

Who is in advance of it or even with it

Wholesale professional dealers in
misfortune

Why authors and actors are ashamed of
being funny?

Why did I not ask? you will say

Will you take the long path with me?

Winning-post a slab of white or gray
stone

Wit knows that his place is at the tail
of a procession.

Wonder how my great trees are coming on
this summer.

World calls him hard names, probably

World has a million roosts for a man,
but only one nest.

Yes, I am a man, like another

Young man knows the rules, but the old
man knows the exceptions

Youth and age--something in the soul

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