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# Quotes by Holmes, Oliver Wendell

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Several years before birth, advertise for a couple of parents belonging to long-lived families.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

The advice of the elders to young men is very apt to be as unreal as a list of the hundred best books.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

Age, like distance lends a double charm.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

To be seventy years young is sometimes far more cheerful and hopeful than to be forty years old.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

A person is always startled when he hears himself called old for the first time.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

The freeman, casting with unpurchased hand the vote that shakes the turrets of the land.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

A great calamity is as old as the trilobites an hour after it has happened.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

What I call a good patient is one who, having found a good physician, sticks to him till he dies.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

To have doubted one's own first principles is the mark of a civilized man.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

What a comfort a dull but kindly person is, to be sure, at times! A ground-glass shade over a gas-lamp does not bring more solace to our dazzled eyes than such a one to our minds.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

Even the wisest woman you talk to is ignorant of something you may know, but an elegant woman never forgets her elegance.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

Apology is only egotism wrong side out.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

Do not be bullied out of your common sense by the specialist; two to one, he is a pedant.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

All generous minds have a horror of what are commonly called facts. They are the brute beasts of the intellectual domain. Who does not know fellows that always have an ill-conditioned fact or two that they lead after them into decent company like so many bull-dogs, ready to let them slip at every ingenious suggestion, or convenient generalization, or pleasant fancy? I allow no facts at this table.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

The greatest act of faith is when a man understands he is not God.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

It's faith in something and enthusiasm for something that makes life worth living.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

Fame usually comes to those who are thinking about something else.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

The Amen of nature is always a flower.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

The very aim and end of our institutions is just this: that we may think what we like and say what we think.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

Don't flatter yourself that friendship authorizes you to say disagreeable things to your intimates. The nearer you come into relation with a person, the more necessary do tact and courtesy become.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

The world is always ready to receive talent with open arms. Very often it does not know what to do with genius.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

Unpretending mediocrity is good, and genius is glorious; but a weak flavor of genius in an essentially common person is detestable. It spoils the grand neutrality of a commonplace character, as the rinsings of an unwashed wine-glass spoil a draught of fair water.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

The mode in which the inevitable comes to pass is through effort.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

A man may fulfill the object of his existence by asking a question he cannot answer, and attempting a task he cannot achieve.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

Good Americans when they die, go to Paris.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

Stillness and steadiness of features are signal marks of good breeding. Vulgar persons can't sit still, or at least must always work their limbs and features.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

Every man is an omnibus in which his ancestors ride.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

A page of history is worth a pound of logic.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

Every library should try to be complete on something, if it were only the history of pinheads.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

People can be divided into two classes: those who go ahead and do something, and those who sit still and inquire, why wasn't it done the other way?

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

Man is born a predestined idealist, for he is born to act. To act is to affirm the worth of an

end, and to persist in affirming the worth of an end is to make an ideal.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

A mind once stretched by a new idea never regains its original dimensions.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

Many ideas grow better when transplanted into another mind than in the one where they sprung up.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

Man's mind, stretched by a new idea, never goes back to its original dimensions.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

A new and valid idea is worth more than a regiment and fewer men can furnish the former than command the latter.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

Insanity is often the logic of an accurate mind overtaken.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

A moment's insight is sometimes worth a life's experience.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

A goose flies by a chart which the Royal Geographical Society could not mend.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

A pun does not commonly justify a blow in return. But if a blow were given for such cause, and death ensued, the jury would be judges both of the facts and of the pun, and might, if the latter were of an aggravated character, return a verdict of justifiable homicide.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

The sound of a kiss is not so loud as that of a cannon, but its echo lasts a great deal longer.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

Knowledge like timber shouldn't be mush use till they are seasoned.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

Life and language are alike sacred. Homicide and verbicide --that is, violent treatment of a word with fatal results to its legitimate meaning, which is its life --are alike forbidden.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

Language is the blood of the soul into which thoughts run and out of which they grow.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

This is a court of law young man, not a court of justice.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

I think that, as life is action and passion, it is required of a man that he should share the passion and action of his time at peril of being judged not to have lived.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

To live is to function. That is all there is in living.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

It is faith in something and enthusiasm for something that makes a life worth looking at.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

It is very lonely sometimes, trying to play God.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

Love is the master key which opens the gates of happiness.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

Where we love is home, home that our feet may leave, but not our hearts.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

I should like to see any kind of a man, distinguishable from a gorilla that some good and even pretty woman could not shape a husband out of.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

I firmly believe that if the whole material medical could be sunk to the bottom of the sea, it would be all the better for mankind, and all the worse for the sea.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

Memories, imagination, old sentiments, and associations are more readily reached through the sense of smell than through any other channel.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

Our brains our seventy year clocks, the angel of life winds them up once and for all, then closes the case, and gives the key into the hands of the angel of resurrection.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

Take a music bath once or twice a week for a few seasons, and you will find that it is to the soul what the water-bath is to the body.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

People talk fundamentals and superlatives and then make some changes of detail.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

A thought is often original, though you have uttered it a hundred times.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

Simple people... are very quick to see the live facts which are going on about them.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

Fresh air is good if you do not take too much of it; most of the achievements and pleasures of life are in bad air.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

You commit a sin of omission if you do not utilize all the power that is within you. All men have claims on man, and to the man with special talents, this is a very special claim. It is required that a man take part in the actions and clashes of his time that the peril of being judged not to have lived at all.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

Sweet is the scene where genial friendship plays the pleasing game of interchanging praise.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

The mind of a bigot is like the pupil of the eye; the more light you pour on it, the more it will contract.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

People who make puns are like wanton boys that put coppers on the railroad tracks. They

amuse themselves and other children, but their little trick may upset a freight train of conversation for the sake of a battered witticism.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

How many people live on the reputation of the reputation they might have made!

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

Love prefers twilight to daylight.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

Don't you stay at home of evenings? Don you love a cushioned seat in a corner, by the fireside, with your slippers on your feet?

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

Revolutions are not made by men in spectacles.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

Young men know the rules, but old men know the exceptions.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

Youth fades; love droops, the leaves of friendship fall; A mother's secret hope outlives them all.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

And Silence, like a poultice, comes to heal the blows of sound.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

Sin has many tools, but a lie is the handle that fits them all.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

God's plan made a hopeful beginning. But man spoiled his chances by sinning. We trust that the story will end in God's glory. But, at present, the other side's winning.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

Society is always trying in some way to grind us down to a single flat surface.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

A good soldier, like a good horse, cannot be of a bad color.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

The man who is always worrying whether or not his soul would be damned generally has a soul that isn't worth a damn.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

Speak clearly, if you speak at all; carve every word before you let it fall.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

The world's great men have not commonly been great scholars, nor its great scholars great men.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

Stupidity often saves a man from going mad.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

As life is action and passion, it is required of a man that he should share the passion and action of his time, at the peril of being not to have lived.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

I find the great thing in this world is not so much where we stand, as in what direction we are moving: To reach the port of heaven, we must sail sometimes with the wind and sometimes against it, but we must sail, and not drift, nor lie at anchor.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

To reach a port we must sail, sometimes with the wind, and sometimes against it. But we must not drift or lie at anchor.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

Beauty is the index of a larger fact than wisdom.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

Old books, you know well, are books of the world's youth, and new books are the fruits of its age.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

The most foolish kind of a book is a kind of leaky boat on the sea of wisdom; some of the wisdom will get in anyhow.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

The best of a book is not the thought which it contains, but the thought which it suggests; just as the charm of music dwells not in the tones but in the echoes of our hearts.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

Speak not too well of one who scarce will know himself transfigured in its roseate glow;  
Say kindly of him what is, chiefly, true, remembering always he belongs to you; Deal with him as a truant, if you will, But claim him, keep him, call him brother still!

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

Grow we must, if we outgrow all that loves us.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

Even for practical purposes theory generally turns out the most important thing in the end.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

Little-minded people's thoughts move in such small circles that five minutes conversation gives you an arc long enough to determine their whole curve.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

Every event that a man would master must be mounted on the run, and no man ever caught the reins of a thought except as it galloped past him.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

The minute a phrase, becomes current, it becomes an apology for not thinking accurately to the end of the sentence.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

The greatest tragedy in America is not the destruction of our natural resources, though that tragedy is great. The truly great tragedy is the destruction of our human resources by our failure to fully utilize our abilities, which means that most men and women go to their graves with their music still in them.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

If I had a formula for bypassing trouble, I would not pass it around. Trouble creates a capacity to handle it. I don't embrace trouble; that's as bad as treating it as an enemy. But I do say: meet it as a friend, for you'll see a lot of it, and had better be on speaking terms with it.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

Put not your trust in money, but put your money in trust.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

A new untruth is better than an old truth.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

Rough work, iconoclasm, but the only way to get at truth.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

Truth, when not sought after, rarely comes to light.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

Truth is tough. It will not break, like a bubble, at the touch, nay, you may kick it about all day like a football, and it will be round and full at evening.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

The great thing in the world is not so much where we stand, as in what direction we are moving.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

Man has will, but woman has her way.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

It is the province of knowledge to speak, and it is the privilege of wisdom to listen.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

A word is not a crystal, transparent and unchanged, it is the skin of a living thought and may vary greatly in color and content according to the circumstances and the time in which it is used.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

Every calling is great when greatly pursued.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

The world has to learn that the actual pleasure derived from material things is of rather low quality on the whole and less even in quantity than it looks to those who have not tried it.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

The older author is constantly rediscovering himself in the more or less fossilized productions of his earlier years.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

Through our great good fortune, in our youth our hearts were touched with fire. It was given to us to learn at the outset that life is a profound and passionate thing.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

Pretty much all the honest truth telling there is in the world is done by children.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

A child's education should begin at least one hundred years before he is born.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

Science is a first-rate piece of furniture for a man's upper chamber, if it has common sense on the ground floor.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

Nothing is so commonplace has the wish to be remarkable.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

Some people are so heavenly minded that they are no earthly good.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

People who honestly mean to be true really contradict themselves much more rarely than those who try to be consistent.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

Every real thought on every real subject knocks the wind out of somebody or other.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

... the hydrostatic paradox of controversy. Don't you know what that means? Well, I will tell you. You know that, if you had a bent tube, one arm of which was of the size of a pipe-stem, and the other big enough to hold the ocean, water would stand at the same height in one as in the other. Controversy equalizes fools and wise men in the same way. And the fools know it.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

Why can't somebody give us a list of things that everybody thinks and nobody says, and another list of things that everybody says and nobody thinks.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

And when you stick on conversation's burrs, don't strew your pathway with those dreadful  
urs.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

In walking, the will and the muscles are so accustomed to working together and performing their task with so little expenditure of force that the intellect is left comparatively free.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

Nature, when she invented, manufactured, and patented her authors, contrived to make critics out of the chips that were left.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

Our dead brothers still live for us and bid us think of life, not death -- of life to which in their youth they lent the passion and glory of Spring. As I listen, the great chorus of life and joy begins again, and amid the awful orchestra of seen and unseen powers and destinies of good and evil, our trumpets, sound once more a note of daring, hope, and will.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

A few can touch the magic string, and noisy fame is proud to win them: Alas for those that never sing, but die with all their music in them!

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

It is now the moment when by common consent we pause to become conscious of our national life and to rejoice in it, to recall what our country has done for each of us, and to ask ourselves what we can do for our country in return.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

But the character of every act depends upon the circumstances in which it is done. The most stringent protection of free speech would not protect a man in falsely shouting fire in a theatre and causing a panic. It does not even protect a man from an injunction against uttering words that may have all the effect of force. The question in every case is whether the words used are used in such circumstances and are of such a nature as to create a clear and present danger that they will bring about the substantive evils that Congress has

a right to prevent. It is a question of proximity and degree.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

I always say, as you know, that if my fellow citizens want to go to Hell I will help them. Its my job.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

I confess that I do not understand the principle on which the power to fix a minimum for the wages of women can be denied by those who admit the power to fix a maximum for their hours of work. I fully assent to the proposition that here as elsewhere the distinctions of the law are distinctions of degree, but I perceive no difference in the kind or degree of interference with liberty, the only matter with which we have any concern, between the one case and the other. The bargain is equally affected whichever half you regulate. It will need more than the Nineteenth Amendment to convince me that there are no differences between men and women, or that legislation cannot take those differences into account.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

Gentlemen, to the lady without whom I should never have survived for eighty, nor sixty, nor yet thirty years. Her smile has been my lyric, her understanding, the rhythm of the stanza. She has been the spring wherefrom I have drawn the power to write the words. She is the poem of my life.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

But when men have realized that time has upset many fighting faiths, they may come to

believe even more than they believe the very foundations of their own conduct that the ultimate good desired is better reached by free trade in ideas that the best test of truth is the power of the thought to get itself accepted in the competition of the market, and that truth is the only ground upon which their wishes safely can be carried out.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

There is no time like the old time, when you and I were young, When the buds of April blossomed, and the birds of spring-time sung! The gardens brightest glories by summer suns are nursed, But oh, the sweet, sweet violets, the flowers that opened first! There is no place like the old place, where you and I were born, Where we lifted first our eyelids on the splendors of the morn From the milk-white breast that warmed us, from the clinging arms that bore, Where the dear eyes glistened oer us that will look on us no more! There is no friend like the old friend, who has shared our morning days, No greeting like his welcome, no homage like his praise: Fame is the scentless sunflower, with gaudy crown of gold; But friendship is the breathing rose, with sweets in every fold. There is no love like the old love, that we courted in our pride; Though our leaves are falling, falling, and were fading side by side, There are blossoms all around us with the colors of our dawn, And we live in borrowed sunshine when the day-star is withdrawn. There are no times like the old times, they shall never be forgot! There is no place like the old place, keep green the dear old spot! There are no friends like our old friends, may Heaven prolong their lives! There are no loves like our old loves, God bless our loving wives!

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

The power to tax is not the power to destroy while this Court sits.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

A question like the present should be disposed of without undue delay. But a State cannot be expected to move with the celerity of a private business man; it is enough if it proceeds, in the language of the English Chancery, with all deliberate speed.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

A river is more than an amenity, it is a treasure.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

The general rule, at least, is that while property may be regulated to a certain extent, if regulation goes too far it will be recognized as a taking.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

Speak not too well of one who scarce will know  
Himself transfigured in its roseate  
glow;  
Say kindly of him what is, chiefly, true,  
Remembering always he belongs to you;  
Deal with him as a truant, if you will,  
But claim him, keep him, call him brother still!

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

Every living sentence which shows a mind at work for itself is to be welcomed. It is not the first use but the tiresome repetition of inadequate catch words which I am observing phrases which originally were contributions, but which, by their very felicity, delay further analysis for fifty years. That comes from the same source as dislike of novelty intellectual indolence or weakness a slackening in the eternal pursuit of the more exact.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

The riders in a race do not stop short when they reach the goal. There is a little finishing canter before coming to a standstill. There is time to hear the kind voice of friends and to say to ones self: The work is done. But just as one says that, the answer comes: The race is over, but the work never is done while the power to work remains. The canter that brings you to a standstill need not be only coming to rest. It cannot be while you still live. For to live is to function. That is all there is in living.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

O Damsel Dorothy! Dorothy Q. !Strange is the gift that I owe to you;Such a gift as never a king  
Save to daughter or son might bring,All my tenure of heart and hand,All my title to  
house and land;Mother and sister and child and wifeAnd joy and sorrow and death and  
life!

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

Life is a romantic business. It is painting a picture, not doing a sumbut you have to make the romance, and it will come to the question how much fire you have in your belly.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

Great constitutional provisions must be administered with caution. Some play must be allowed for the joints of the machine, and it must be remembered that legislatures are ultimate guardians of the liberties and welfare of the people in quite as great a degree as the courts.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

It cannot be helped, it is as it should be, that the law is behind the times.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

It is revolting to have no better reason for a rule of law than that so it was laid down in the time of Henry IV.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

When twenty years ago a vague terror went over the earth and the word socialism began to be heard, I thought and still think that fear was translated into doctrines that had no proper place in the Constitution or the common law. Judges are apt to be naif, simple-minded men, and they need something of Mephistopheles. We too need education in the obvious to learn to transcend our own convictions and to leave room for much that we hold dear to be done away with short of revolution by the orderly change of law.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

Nature has but one judgment on wrong conduct if you can call that a judgment which seemingly has no reference to conduct as such the judgment of death.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell

I do not think the United States would come to an end if we lost our power to declare an Act of Congress void. I do think the Union would be imperiled if we could not make that declaration as to the laws of the several States.

- Holmes, Oliver Wendell





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