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Works of Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr, by Oliver Wendell  
Holmes and David Widger**

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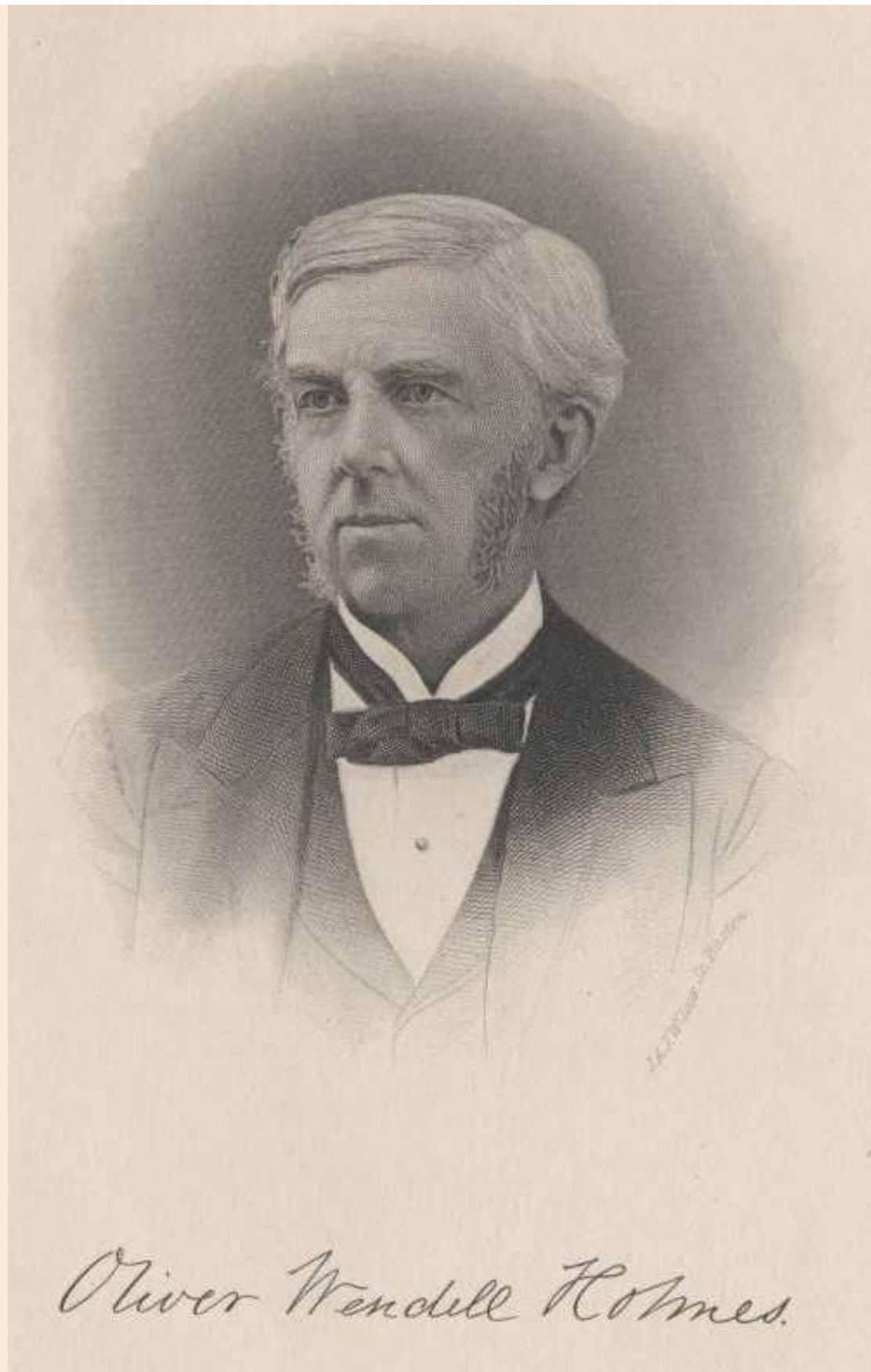
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## OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES

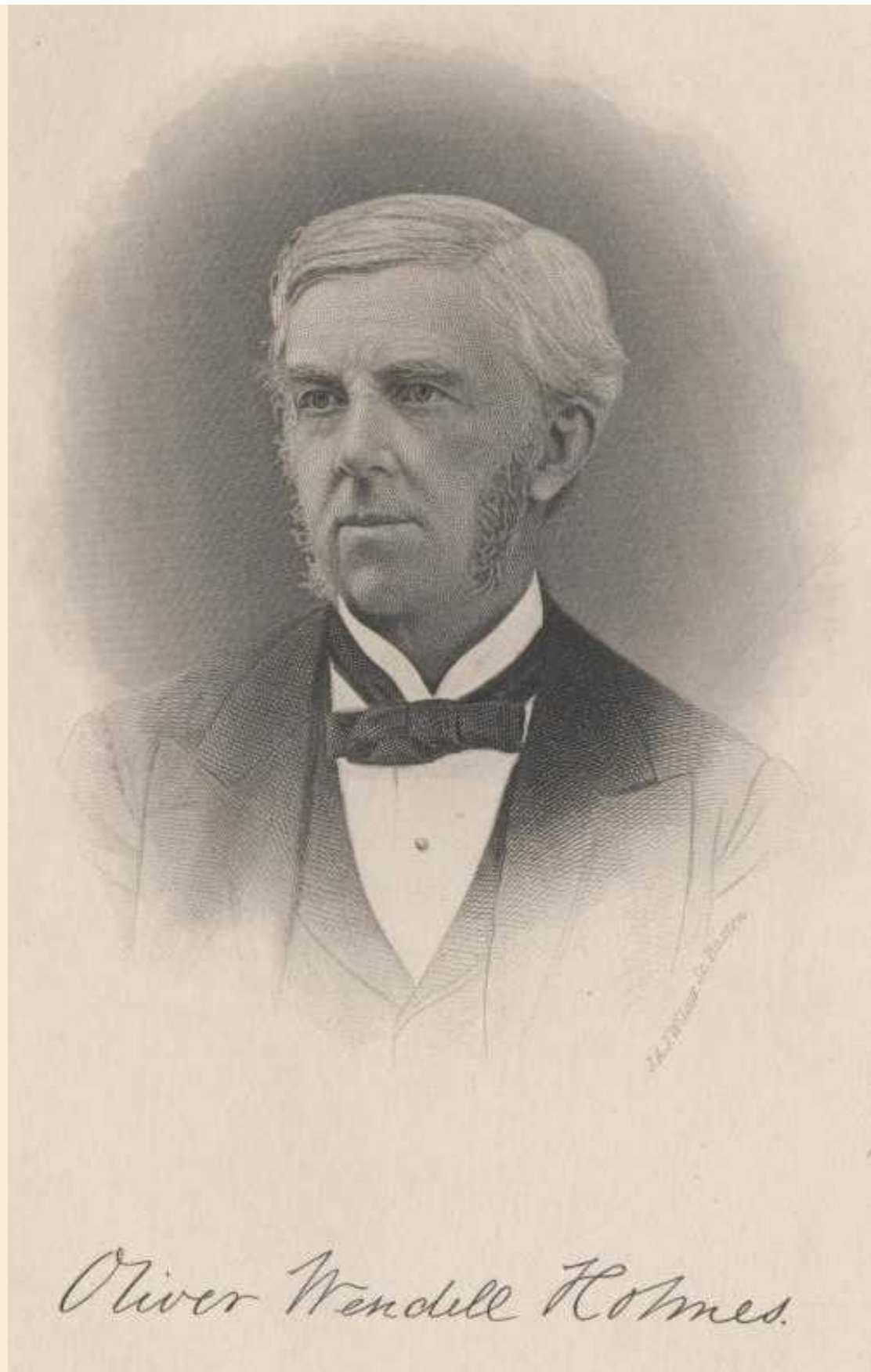
### Editor's Note

*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 family doctor of the early 1800's.*



Oliver Wendell Holmes.





Oliver Wendell Holmes.



*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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