

Boston April 26
1858

Gentlemen

I am much obliged
to you for the proof of Mr. Allen's
Dictionary containing the notices
of my father and myself.

Both of them are kindly and
carefully executed, and I per-
ceive but one error in either.

Jacob Wendell was my great
grandfather - Oliver Wendell,
as you can easily shew, - my
grandfather.

If the papers I am now
writing for the Atlantic Monthly,

which you are pleased to say,
and I am willing to believe,
have been read with pleasure,
should add anything to my
reputation, it would please
me, of course to have them referred
to if it were agreeable to the
author of the work. Perhaps I
may venture to say that the
praise which has been bestowed
upon some of them by writers not
having any personal or local
relations with myself - and
on some of the poems they contain
especially one called "The Chambered
Nautilus" has made me wish
that they might be weighed with
my early and sometimes immature

and trivial efforts in estimating
my literary character.

I do not mean to grieve for
my handsome treatment by
plagiarists of the writer, but I
must say I was surprised
at the accuracy and deluge
of the notice of myself. It
contains many things that
were new to me among dis-
critical excerpts, and the
high imitation of my grand-
father for my great-grand-
father is one that has been
repeated in print ever
since it was started in
the account of the "Beckstein

Jubilee" - So that I trust
you may be the first to correct
it. If the work is finished
as perfectly as this specimen,
it will be the most admirable
volume of literary information
I ever saw or heard of.

Yours very truly
W. Holmes.

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MS. A. 9. 2. 7. 7-00

DR. OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES, A. L. S., 26 April 1858,
to [Childs and Peterson, Philadelphia, publishers of *Allibone's*
Dictionary].

Boston April 26
1858

Gentlemen

I am much obliged to you for the proof of Mr. Allibone's Dictionary containing the notices of my father and myself.

Both of them are kindly and carefully executed, and I perceive but one error in either. Jacob Wendell was my *great-grandfather*—Oliver Wendell, as your own article shows,—my grandfather.

If the papers I am now writing for the *Atlantic Monthly*, [p. 2] which you are pleased to say, and I am willing to believe, have been read with pleasure, should add anything to my reputation, it would please me, of course to have them referred to if it were agreeable to the author of the work. Perhaps I may venture to say that the praise which has been bestowed upon some of them by writers not having any personal or local relations with myself—and on some of the poems they contain especially one called "The chambered Nautilus" has made me wish that they might be weighed with my early and sometimes immature [p. 3] and trivial efforts in estimating my literary character.

I do not mean to pay for my handsome treatment by flattery of the writer, but I must say I was surprised at the accuracy and diligence of the notice of myself. It contains many things that were new to me among its critical excerpts, and the slight mistake of my grandfather for my great-grandfather is one that has been repeated in print ever since it

was started in the account of the "Berkshire [p. 4] Jubilee"—so that I trust you may be the first to correct it. If the work is finished as perfectly as this specimen, it will be the most admirable volume of literary information I ever saw or heard of.

Yours very truly
O W Holmes.

ALS, 4 pages. Double sheet, 20 x 13 cm.

Laid paper. No watermark.

Provenance: Gribbell sale, Oct 1940 (one of two letters sold together as no. 322). Inserted in *Autocrat of the Breakfast Table* (Boston, 1858)—apparently purchased separately.

Published by Lyle H. Kendall, Jr., "Dr. Holmes, Allibone's *Dictionary*, and Dr. Mackenzie," *Papers on English Literature and Language*, I (1965), 181–183.

Notes: 1. In 1852 the Anglo-Irish journalist Dr. R. Shelton Mackenzie, an energetic and prolific contributor to various British periodicals, emigrated to America, settling in Philadelphia by 1857. Here, in addition to other projects, he was involved in the production of S. Austin Allibone's *A Critical Dictionary of English Literature*, the first volume of which was published by Childs and Peterson in 1858. No doubt "the author" of Holmes's letter was Mackenzie, for when the "grandfather" mistake was corrected in the proofsheets, not only was a short paragraph added—praising the "Autocrat" as "exceedingly popular"—but a long one as well (though in reduced type), exclaiming over Holmes's presumed English audience—Hazlitt, Lamb, Hunt, Dickens—signed Dr. R. Shelton Mackenzie. Scholarship on Mackenzie is virtually nonexistent, but see David Bonnell Green, "Elizabeth Barrett and R. Shelton Mackenzie," *Studies in Bibliography*, XIV (1961), 245–250.

2. The citation of "early and sometimes immature and trivial efforts" includes poems appearing in *The Collegian* (1830), "Terpsichore" (1843), "Urania" (1846), and "Astraea" (1850). Among the "critical excerpts" are passages from, for example, *North American Review*, *Knickerbocker*, *Athenæum*, and *Irish Quarterly Review*; surely Mackenzie was quoting from his own work in certain of them.

3. For a short relation of the "Jubilee" see Thomas Franklin Currier, *A Bibliography of Oliver Wendell Holmes*, ed. Eleanor M. Tilton (New York, 1953), page 281. The "account" that Holmes refers to is *The Berkshire Jubilee, Celebrated at Pittsfield, Mass. August 22 and 23, 1844* (Albany and Pittsfield, 1845; BAL 8740).

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