

retirement to private life in Virginia. The last letter which we received from him expressed his regret that he could no longer attend the meetings which he so much enjoyed and where he renewed so many social contacts. C. S. B.

ALEXANDER JAMES WALL

Horatio Alger soon after the Civil War began writing books which chronicled the lives of boys who through their own efforts rose from humble beginnings to positions of power and influence. Scarcely anyone in the field of librarianship and bibliography would have attracted that author's interest more than the late Alexander J. Wall. Born at 110 Fourth Avenue, New York City, on October 25, 1884, the son of Lorenz and Augusta (Ziemer) Wohlhagen, he left school in 1898, at the age of fourteen, to enter the employ of the New York Historical Society. Beginning at the bottom rung on the ladder, he performed whatever duties the Librarian, Mr. Robert H. Kelby, required. I remember him well in those early days, when the Library of the Historical Society was located at Second Avenue and Eleventh Street. His cheerfulness and uncanny ability to find books was quickly noted by members and researchers. Mr. Kelby soon found that he could rely upon the young assistant, and often used him to write his letters in long hand.

The Library was moved to its present location in 1908, and soon after young Wohlhagen was made assistant librarian. In 1916 he published his first historical contribution, the compilation of the marriage and death records from the *New York Weekly Museum*, which was published in several successive volumes of Valentine's *Manual of New York City*. In 1917 he had his name legally changed to Alexander J. Wall. Soon afterwards he began upon a check-

list of New York Almanacs from 1694 to 1850. This brought him to the American Antiquarian Society for several visits and became his most important contribution to bibliography. It was printed in successive issues of the New York Public Library Bulletin in 1920, with a reprint the following year.

In 1921, when Mr. Kelby retired, Mr. Wall was elected librarian. He immediately launched several new projects, one of the most valuable being the issuing of photostat reproductions of early New York newspapers. The Society had established a Quarterly Bulletin in 1917 and this publication Mr. Wall edited, and contributed many of the articles from that time until his death. In fact, for over twenty-five years his name was connected with practically everything the Society published, either as author, editor, or the writer of prefaces. Charles E. Baker's list of his writings, published in the Quarterly Bulletin for July, 1944, is an imposing tribute to his industry and breadth of historical interest. It was this constant routine of editing publications, not to mention the directing of the activities of the Society, that prevented him from producing any enduring historical volume over his own name.

In 1937 when the large funds from the Thompson estate brought nearly five million dollars to the Society's coffers, Mr. Wall entered with all his enthusiasm and energy into the enlargement of the Library building and the development of its resources. He travelled abroad with the President of the Society to study foreign galleries and museums, and especially the arrangement of exhibits and the foreign development in lighting systems. His friendship with President Zabriskie and his admiration for the "Chief," made a team which always worked for the best interest of the Society. Mr. Wall's article "In Search of Light," published in the Quarterly Bulletin in October 1938, aroused favorable comment from museum directors throughout the country,

and the Historical Society profited through his studies by installing in its new picture galleries one of the best lighting systems in any American museum. The new building was dedicated with appropriate ceremonies on March 30, 1939, and the Society embarked upon a career of added prestige and influence. But Mr. Wall himself became so immersed in administrative duties that he had little time to devote to writing or to the increase of the library. He had reached the highest salary paid to any library or museum director in the country, but in spite of all this professional and financial success, he did not live long to enjoy it. Troubled with ill health for several years, he continued to work rather than recuperate and finally on April 14, 1944, his life of usefulness was ended.

Mr. Wall married, November 26, 1906, Lillian B. Hashagen, who with a son, Capt. Alexander J. Wall, Jr., survive him. He was elected to the American Antiquarian Society in 1924. He was also upon the Council of the Bibliographical Society and served as its Treasurer from 1942 until his death.

One of Mr. Wall's outstanding qualities was his friendliness. Few people enjoyed a party with companionable friends more than he did. About twenty-five years ago, Wall, Lawrence Wroth of the Carter Brown Library, Otis Hammond of the New Hampshire Historical Society, and I met at least twice a year in New York for social relaxation and for intimate exchange of views on library problems. Many an important historical project was launched at these meetings. About the same period, Mr. Wall and I dined frequently with Mr. Charles F. Heartman, first in New York, then at Metuchen, and finally in New Orleans. Then came the parties with Wall, Wroth, Hammond, and generally some visiting scholar, such as Charles Evans or Henry Stevens, at James B. Wilbur's in Manchester, Vermont. In

later years there were gatherings of the same group at the Greenwoods' interesting early eighteenth-century home at Time Stone Farm in Marlborough. At all of these parties, Mr. Wall was the moving spirit in entertainment and sociability.

As I look back on what I have written, I realize that this is not the usual type of either eulogy or necrology. Perhaps I have emphasized too much the social side of "Alec" Wall's character, but a love of social contacts was an outstanding side of his nature. I am not so sure but that this quality, which endeared him so greatly to his friends, was a predominant reason for his success in life. C. S. B.

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