



*C. S. Muller*

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## ALEXANDER STRONG WHEELER

MEMBER OF THE CORPORATION OF THE MASSACHUSETTS  
INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY, 1882-1907

Alexander Strong Wheeler, whose death on April 13, 1907, deprived the Corporation of the Institute of one of its oldest, most devoted, and most important members, was born at East Sudbury (or, as it is now called, Wayland), Mass., on the 7th of August, 1820. The Wheeler family came from Concord, though his grandfather, Abner Wheeler, lived in Lincoln.

His father, Asa Wheeler, was unfortunate in business, and, when Alexander was three years old, his parents moved to Orford, N.H., the birthplace of his mother, Emily Strong, and the home of his grandfather, Alexander Strong. His father and mother continued to be poor, but Mr. Strong was a prosperous farmer, with the ambitious desire to send one of his grandchildren to college. He wisely chose Alexander for this career, and sent him to school at Meriden, and afterwards at Haverhill, to prepare for Dartmouth. The grandfather died before his plan could be carried out, but a half-brother of Alexander, some ten years his senior, aided him, and he himself was able to earn something by teaching school in the vacations, and thus make his way

through the college from which he graduated in 1840. He had already selected the law as his profession, and after tutoring for a year in a private family in Orange County, Va., entered a law office in Troy, N.Y., declining an offer of a clerkship in one of the departments at Washington. After a year at Troy he attended the Harvard Law School, and, though he could afford to stay but for one term, he always looked upon the training he received there under Story and Greenleaf as invaluable, and regarded them as ideal teachers.

In 1843 he entered the office of Sidney Bartlett as a student, and the day before his admission to the bar Mr. Bartlett, who was already one of the leading lawyers in Boston, offered to take him into partnership. Attractive as this offer was, he declined it without hesitation to carry out an arrangement which he had already made with his classmate, Henry C. Hutchins. This was the turning-point of his career. He was still indebted to his brother for a part of the cost of his education, and the brave and honorable resolution to forego the assured position and income which Mr. Bartlett's proposition gave him, and to start instead with a partner of his own age to make his own way, rather than disappoint a friend, was highly characteristic.

The connection between Mr. Wheeler and Mr. Hutchins was a remarkable one. Born on the same day, the former in East Sudbury, Mass., the latter in Bath, N.H., they met for the first time at school in Haverhill, became friends, were classmates and finally room-mates at Dartmouth, separated temporarily after leaving college, but as soon as possible formed the partnership which lasted during their lives and has been continued by their sons. The close intimacy between them was by no means confined to business.

When they were for any reason separated, their correspondence was frequent and regular. The partnership lasted for fifty years, from Jan. 1, 1844, to the death of Mr. Hutchins, Oct. 28, 1894. During that time there were several periods of years at a time during which one or the other partner was, by reason of illness or accident, unable to do any part of the work, yet no change was ever made in the division of the income.

It may be interesting to recall that after the Boston fire, when almost all the local insurance companies had failed, Mr. Wheeler acted as their counsel, attended to their reorganization, and drafted and presented to the legislature the statute which made this possible. This is not the place, however, to speak at length of Mr. Wheeler's professional career. He was the trusted adviser of a very large number of active business men, and he made use of his legal knowledge, his practical good sense, and the influence over men which was given him, partly by these qualities, but above all by his brave, simple, and kindly nature, to avert quarrels and prevent unnecessary litigation. Mindful of this, his family, when asked to choose one of the beatitudes as the subject for a memorial window which they desired to place in Arlington Street Church, selected "Blessed are the Peacemakers."

Recognizing the value of Mr. Wheeler's business judgment and sound common sense, some of his clients, who were corporations, asked him to act upon their boards of directors, and the Second National Bank and Bigelow Carpet Company greatly appreciated the long and faithful service which he rendered them in this capacity.

He felt it part of the duty of every one to give a portion of his time and strength to public and benevolent work, and was for many years one of the trustees, and also for a time

the president, of the Boston Asylum and Farm School. He was elected into the Corporation of the Institute in 1882, and was placed upon the Committee of the School of Industrial Science, a comparatively large body, to which, in connection with the President, was intrusted the management of the institution. After Mr. Rogers's death he took an active part in remodelling the by-laws and substituting for this large committee the present small Executive Committee. Of this he was one of the original members, and to the time of his resignation, in 1902, he continued to be most active and attentive to its duties. He thus took part in the decision of all the important questions which confronted the Institute during that long period, and gave gladly the benefit of his legal knowledge, large experience, and wise estimate of men and things. His kindly disposition and warm sympathy with the feelings and opinions of others led him to cultivate and encourage the greatest harmony and friendliness in the committee and in the Corporation and between them and the Faculty. He was a fervent and devoted admirer of the Institute and an optimist as to its future, jealous of its reputation and high standards, and willing to go very far in favoring any desirable enlargement, whether in land, buildings, curriculum, or staff, in the confident faith that, if the work were good, the financial support would not be lacking.

Mr. Wheeler was sincerely religious, and never failed to attend church on Sunday when physically able, and in his household he kept up the old fashion of conducting family prayers every morning. He was a member of Arlington Street Church in Boston, and served for some years on its Prudential Committee. He was also trustee of the Massachusetts Bible Society, and a member, and at one time president, of the Unitarian Club.



While never a candidate for any political office, he took a great interest in public questions, and wrote papers on the Tariff, on Socialism, on Banking, Labor, and other subjects of that character, some of which were published in magazines, and some read before the Boston Commercial Club or other organizations.

Such a brief account as I have been able to give presents but a poor picture of Mr. Wheeler's character, which was at once strong, broad, and charming. His sympathies were wide, and his kindness and courtesy to young men was most striking, as the writer has often had occasion to appreciate. Particularly, also, his heart went out to those who had their own way to make, and to this was due much of the love he bore the Institute.

WILLIAM LOWELL PUTNAM.

## AMERIKANISCHES HOCHSCHULWESEN

EXTRACTS FROM A PAMPHLET PUBLISHED IN LEIPZIG BY DR. W.  
BÖETTGER, PRIVATDOZENT AT THE UNIVERSITY

Translated by Chauncy C. Batchelor.

When I received an invitation to spend a year as Research Associate in the Research Laboratory of Physical Chemistry at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, I was inclined, in the first place, to accept because I had made the acquaintance of a considerable number of the many American students who visit the University of Leipzig (especially the Physical Chemistry Institute), and thus had a good preliminary knowledge. In the second place I was glad of the opportunity to work in the school of one of the best-known chemists of America, and to become acquainted with the methods of instruction in American institutions of the higher learning.

In this essay I have recorded not merely my impressions of the things which appear especially remarkable to new-comers in America, but rather a few observations on which I have based some conceptions formed after mature consideration, in part not until several months after my return home. With this caution, I think, it becomes easier to separate the real from the unreal. The danger of confounding the incidental with the typical, and thus getting a false conception of conditions in America, is greater than might be expected. Soon after the visitor arrives in the new country, owing to the overpowering and contradictory impressions which he receives, he falls into such a mental state that, unconsciously, he is unable to make clear observations. This condition lasts the longer, the more the traveller attempts to see. It soon becomes evident that this hasty method leads to injustice, but nevertheless the observer realizes that he is helpless before the multitude of widely varying phenomena. Not until much later does he become convinced that it is not a hopeless problem, but that, however, he must observe and experiment care-

fully before he can draw any very far-reaching conclusions. If I am not mistaken, many criticisms which I consider unjust, and which I mention in the following pages, are due to just this incomplete clarification of ideas.

*The Institutions of Higher Learning*

Among the many problems which press for solution in an article concerning a country of such strongly pulsing life, I shall pay special attention to education, and in particular to the institutions of higher learning. The more detailed discussion of this subject seems warranted because of the interest shown in various ways by Germany in the development of college education which has occurred in America during recent years. This attention is doubtless justified; for we need only remember that the public high schools established lately in certain German cities have existed for over sixty-five years in Boston, and the academies of practical medicine founded a few years ago are anticipated by schools in New York. It is certainly not too much to say that America in matters of education, and particularly in those of higher education, is the land of experimentation on a large scale. Familiarity with American college education will be instructive in another respect. We not only may obtain data for the solution of problems which with us are only in the theoretical stage, but, on closer consideration of what we may observe there, we may find underlying principles, the knowledge and consideration of which will be of great value.

It is easily comprehensible that we in this country should have hitherto paid little attention to American college education, for German universities enjoy such world-wide reputation that it would surely be reckless to doubt the soundness of their fundamental principles. Moreover, university education in America has assumed its present significance in perhaps only the last thirty years, although some universities, like Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and Columbia, are considerably older. The whole movement is, then, much younger, and for that reason more practical. We might be tempted to believe that the study of a system



of higher education still in active process of development might be rather purposeless, because it is unfinished. It can only be answered, however, that this makes the study difficult, but not futile. In many important problems Americans have already established their position. It is only the form of expression, then, which changes. Regarding certain other problems there is disagreement, and so various experiments are being tried; but among us many of these problems are left untouched.

It may be stated with certainty concerning their activity in the province of higher education that the Americans, in the short space of a few decades, have obtained very notable and original results. This is not very surprising upon closer examination; for we have only to remember that many young Americans, after ending their studies at home, go abroad to complete and enrich their education. They return in due course, not only with their diploma, but, what is more important, with a broader view of the world, which, doubtless, materially helps their later activity as teachers. Therefore, it is no wonder that the prosperity of the American colleges, and with it the growth of knowledge, has come upon them so swiftly.

American colleges in the East are practically all private institutions. In the Central and Western States, state and private colleges exist side by side. Primarily, the advantages of the state as against the private university seemed to me so obvious that, soon after my arrival in Boston, I asked an American professor whether there was no prospect of the private universities being taken over by the State. The brief answer: "There is no danger of that," surprised me at the time very much. Since then, however, I have become convinced that the system of private universities, at least under existing conditions, is quite practical. If, in the following pages, I confine myself chiefly to the private universities, I do so without any implication that the founding of private universities here is an object worth striving for. Our discussion must be limited to those circumstances which increase the effectiveness of the universities as institutions for the deepening of knowledge and the increase of power, which in our system do not play such an important part. The most important difference between State and private universities

is that the latter receive no subsidy from the State and consequently are more independent. For this reason, however, the president of the university not only must be the intellectual leader, but also has thrust upon him the onerous duty of providing the necessary means for the subsistence of the university. Under conditions with which we are familiar, this would be an impossibility; but in America, where so many people have acquired wealth easily, it is essentially less difficult. Even so it is hard enough, so that the ideas which we get of the wealth of American universities are quite often without foundation. This system, however, unavoidably smacks somewhat of commercialism.

This circumstance may easily appear to us\*very disadvantageous, and it cannot be denied, perhaps, that the complete, or almost complete, independence, and the resulting material self-reliance, have the immediate effect of placing the private university and its achievements at the mercy of chance circumstances, such as the intellectual and financial activity of the president and the interest of rich people, when the corresponding official aid of the State is lacking. We must not overlook the fact, however, that this method of college organization also offers advantages, especially since the same man who is responsible for the competent instruction and who, with the help of other officers, governs the economic interests of the college, remains in closest connection with the college, with its vital interests and with its sphere of influence. As a result, more attention is paid to local state interests than in a system of economic centralization. The organization of the American university favors differentiation, but this differentiation can normally apply only to those details which affect the existence and influence of the institution. As soon as differentiation is carried to such a point that one college falls below another in achievement, then attendance decreases, and its existence is imperilled. Since the consequences of this failure to obtain definite results do not make themselves felt quickly, we may perceive in this another advantage,—that of greater mobility and easier adaptability, which, to be sure, involves sometimes a great disadvantage, that of instability.

The necessity for financial self-support requires that capital should