William Alexander Jackson
1905–1964

W. H. Bond

(Concluded)

Before the autumn when Jackson left New York for Cambridge, his work on the Pforzheimer Catalogue was complete. It was even in page-proof, though publication was delayed for another two years. He immediately plunged into his new responsibilities at Harvard, inaugurated his famous course in bibliography, and began learning the collections and determining what could best be done to build them up.

The Friends of the Harvard College Library, an organization dating back at least to 1925 but fallen somewhat into the doldrums, was revived, largely at the hands of Philip Hofer, who served as Secretary. Jackson and Hofer took their place in the bibliophilic world of Boston, becoming members of the Club of Odd Volumes, of which each was eventually to serve as President. They also began the practice of showing the Library’s newest treasures at the annual meeting of the Visiting Committee. Their spirited presentation, the erudition they displayed, and the spectacular quality of the books and manuscripts soon established this as a regular custom of the committee, and helped to secure sustained and powerful support from its members for the activities of the Library.

Space is the perpetual problem of the learned librarian; his inventory always increases and never diminishes. Rare books and manuscripts also require a controlled atmosphere for their better preservation, particularly in an urban industrial environment such as Cambridge. In 1938 the Treasure Room was on the first floor of the Widener Library, where it occupied as a reading room the chamber now used by the Widener cataloguing staff. A portion of the adjacent stack was shut off from the rest of the Library for rare book storage. On the ground floor immediately beneath was the Lower Treasure Room, with offices for Jackson and Hofer and their secretaries. Opening off this was a locked stack for Hofer’s personal collection, occupying an area that now houses computation equipment. A nearby study contained
a Washington press and some type, then mainly used by the staff. When bibliographical students printed, they did so at the Harvard Printing Office in Randall Hall (now destroyed: formerly on the site of William James Hall), under the tutelage of Charles Grassinger, who had worked as compositor under Bruce Rogers.

Several large tables just outside Hofer’s stack provided space for study and work, and a small room with a long table served for the bibliographical seminar. Since smoking was not permitted anywhere in Widener, the now disused west door was often opened for the enjoyment of a cigarette just outside the sanctuary.

The space was barely adequate for staff and collections, but the conditions of storage were not. Jackson shortly had a rudimentary humidifying system installed in the Treasure Room stack; some of the fittings can still be seen. Nothing practical could be done about temperature, but at least the books could be saved from baking dry during the winter months of steam heat. Further expansion of the Treasure Room stack could only be accomplished at the expense of Widener’s normal stack area, which was itself dangerously near capacity.

Help was at hand. At the meeting of the Visiting Committee in February 1940, the talk turned to rare books and the need to provide for them in a university library, and Arthur Amory Houghton, Jr., (’29), volunteered to back the building of a completely new facility. His offer was accepted with alacrity, a site on the slope east of Widener was selected, and Jackson was shortly in conference with the architects, the firm of Perry, Shaw, and Hepburn. Excavation began in October 1940; the building was largely completed before Pearl Harbor Day in 1941; early in the new year the transfer of the collections was begun, and the Houghton Library was formally opened on February 28, 1942.

Every feature of the building received Jackson’s constant and concentrated personal attention. He made numerous trips to New York to consult with Arthur Houghton at all stages of the planning, and Houghton repeatedly visited Cambridge for the same purpose. Keyes Metcalf advised on stack layout and technical library equipment, and Philip Hofer constantly gave the benefit of his judgment in various matters of design and decoration. All were determined to see that Harvard’s rare books received the best possible housing.

The air conditioning system was the most advanced of its day. A new kind of cool lighting was used in display cases. The metal stack
shelving was specially designed and manufactured to rigorous specifications so that it could have no possible rough edge to injure a binding. Jackson later told with pride of the hours he spent with the blueprints tracing every possible route through the building simply to make sure that one could go anywhere, always able to turn on the lights ahead and turn off those behind without having to retrace one's steps. This was typical of his meticulous attention to detail. The very few awkward spots of this kind that exist are mainly the result of later remodeling or of new functions not originally anticipated.

The same care went into the public aspects of the building. The double entrance staircase and porch owe something to the Queen's House, a building Jackson had seen and remembered in Greenwich, England. The light and pleasant rooms of the Department of Printing and Graphic Arts were, of course, designed according to Philip Hofer's tastes and specifications. The Keats Room at the north end of the top floor was paneled in walnut and featured an antique chandelier, the twin of one in Arthur Houghton's personal library at Wye Plantation in Maryland. At the other end of the building a room was designed in English oak for the future accommodation of the library of William King Richardson, ('80), designated for Harvard by bequest and placed in the room after Mr. Richardson's death in 1951.

Other rooms were designed around certain furnishings that Jackson had found. His office, for example, was based on three enormous glass-fronted mahogany bookcases from the home of Daniel B. Fearing, angling collector and sometime mayor of Newport, Rhode Island. These were to house Jackson's own bibliographical collection. A huge mahogany library table became his desk, but it had to be cut down to fit. The excess wood was transformed into a small standing desk for easy consultation of reference works.

Jackson's interest did not end with the planning and construction of the Library. The building and its contents reflect his unflagging concern for its upkeep. He insisted on the highest standards of maintenance, and the custodial staff have always responded accordingly.

When the Houghton Library opened, it could be said without boasting to be the most advanced library building in the United States, if not in the world, and to a large degree its success resulted from Jackson's thought and effort. No building to rival it could be built during the war years. Since the war, even though there have been important technical improvements in air-conditioning, lighting, and
other details of structure and equipment, the basic principles specified for the Houghton Library are still standard for the design of rare-book libraries.

Jackson’s staff by no means expanded in proportion to the magnificence of the new surroundings. His office force consisted of a secretary, an assistant, and an accessions typist. Procedures were simple but effective. Jackson read dealers’ and auction catalogues, marked entries, and turned them over to his assistant to be checked against the Harvard holdings. He did much checking himself, especially when there was an unusual press of business; even in those somewhat less competitive days, promptness spelled the difference between securing or losing a book. The checking went beyond merely determining whether or not Harvard already had the book. It also attempted to assess its desirability and appropriateness in terms of the existing collections and the literature of which it was a part. Experience told Jackson whether the price was a proper one or not.

The assistant also made accessions records of all currently received printed books and most manuscripts (there was no Manuscript Department until 1948), answered certain inquiries and compiled data so that Jackson could answer others, and did all manner of odd jobs from guiding visitors to setting up exhibitions. No more concentrated bibliographical training covering so wide a variety of material could possibly have been devised, as the long line of men who held the post would surely testify. Not until several years after World War II did Jackson acquire a second assistant to deal exclusively with the problems of the Short-title Catalogue.

Both by necessity and choice Jackson participated as occasion arose in every aspect of the Library’s functions. Administrative isolation never appealed to him. He resented anything that cut him off from first-hand contact with the books themselves. Apart from that there were often times when every available staff member had to pitch in to finish a piece of work.

In fact, at no time could the Houghton Library be said to be overstaffed, and Jackson himself usually went to take a hand in the actual

---

* Jackson’s assistants in order of tenure were: W. H. McCarthy, Jr.; John Alden; G. W. Cottrell, Jr.; W. H. Bond; L. M. Oliver; W. B. Todd; R. E. Stoddard; K. C. Carpenter; M. J. Faigel; and S. E. Ives, IV.

* The principal assistants on the S.T.C. were: Miss Frederica Oldach; Miss Anne Henry (now Mrs. Irvin Ehrenpreis); Miss Janet Eagleson (now Mrs. John Critics); and Miss Katharine Pantzer.
packing and transfer of any large new acquisitions. Sometimes it was a one-man expedition. When it was a mass assault, nobody worked harder, longer, or to better effect than he. He even drove the rented truck transporting W. B. Osgood Field's books from Lake Monhegan to Cambridge, suffering an incredible number of flat tires (wartime re-caps) as the ancient vehicle chugged across Connecticut and Massachusetts. And when it came time to move the contents of the old Treasure Room stack to the new Library, he headed the crew made up of W. H. McCarthy, Jr., Miss Carolyn E. Jakeman, and one or two other stalwarts, who accomplished the entire back-breaking task. The same crew spent a wild last night before opening for business, chancing and killing mice that had found their way in during building operations.

Even before the Houghton Library was built, Jackson's collecting activities for Harvard were in full career. The detailed story of his achievement is set out in his annual reports, which began to appear in 1942 and were foreshadowed by the descriptive booklet he prepared for the opening of the library earlier that same year.

For the first time he was dealing not merely with English books before 1641, or even English literature in general, but with the whole range of subjects, cultures, languages, and periods represented in a great university library. His response was quick and sure. Instinctively he was able to sense the important books even when he could not read a word of the language involved; and he continued his custom of rigorous self-education by seeking out and mastering the works that could best inform him about an unfamiliar field. All his life he required less sleep than most men, and he spent many night hours gutting one book after another and filing their contents away for future reference in his extraordinary memory.

First he explored the Harvard collections in detail; then he began to follow the library axiom of building on strength. Certain fields, he felt, were a Harvard responsibility: for example, the leading authors of New England. He collected their published works in depth; but even more important, he set out to garner their personal papers. The current vogue for collecting literary archives did not then exist in university circles. In fact, not many years earlier a previous librarian at Harvard had declared that the library should not collect manuscript materials if they could be avoided.

Jackson was a pioneer in this kind of endeavor. As so often during his career, he recognized the importance of a neglected area and then
persuaded friends and administrators of the validity of his judgment. In the field of New England letters he secured from their respective trustees the permanent deposit of the Emerson and Longfellow papers; from descendants the deposit or gift of Holmes, Lowell, Melville, Alcott, Higginson, Aldrich, Howells, and various allied archives; and from a generous donor the money to purchase the Emily Dickinson papers. These were backed up by an impressive series of archives of the great New England families whose interests were basically mercantile or financial but who upheld the grand intellectual tradition of the region and associated on equal terms with artists, poets, philosophers, and scholars. In pursuit of such goals he was irresistibly enthusiastic, and not much that he set his heart on ever eluded him. Jackson in full cry after a desirable acquisition was a phenomenon not soon to be forgotten.

Extremely limited income from endowed funds forced him to rely heavily on gifts in cash and in kind. Although new to raising money, he speedily became expert. By knowing the personal interests of prospective donors, he would bring giver and gift together in a pleasing harmony that resulted in substantial gains for the library and a glow of achievement for its benefactors. At a meeting of the Colonial Society one day, he remarked, “Steve, I believe you and I are the only men here who can truly appreciate the significance of this [10th century] manuscript of Horace.” This led to further conversation on the topic. Not long after, Stephen W. Phillips ('95), had the pleasure of giving Harvard the Horace that is now MS Latin 199, one of the two earliest Latin classical text manuscripts of any substance in the United States.

In acquiring private libraries and collections for Harvard, Jackson was equally successful. Here his study of provenance and his long memory were of great value. He could walk into a library new to him and straightway begin to tell its owner all sorts of unsuspected facts about the books: who had owned them and when, what sales they had appeared in, the meaning of this armorial bearing or that classical motto, and very often the number and location of other copies. His wide experience and acquaintance in the book world frequently enabled him to put a collector on the trail of an elusive desideratum. Faced with such expertise, collectors readily agreed to designate their treasures for Harvard. Jackson’s sheer desire to add them to Harvard’s collections caused long lines of books to follow this Pied Piper to the
library shelves. His annual reports contain on every page the names of his and the library’s friends who contributed so much to the success of his collecting endeavors. Lack of space, not lack of gratitude, prompts the omission of the lengthy roll from this biographical sketch; it belongs more properly in a history of the library.

Jackson’s collecting was always highly selective. He never grasped merely because the object was scarce or costly, though it must be admitted that he was sometimes devilishly ingenious at justification. The scholarly dealers learned that Harvard would give intelligent attention to the books they had to offer even when relatively obscure. They responded with the kind of support that is absolutely essential for a learned library. As far as his limited funds would stretch, Jackson would buy if convinced of the importance of the book for Harvard.

But the test of a librarian’s acquisitions is not rarity, curiosity, or monetary value. These are side issues too often mistaken for the main purpose of collecting. The real test is the use scholars make of the collections. By this standard there can be no question of Jackson’s brilliant success. During his administration the number of readers in the Houghton Library increased threefold; inquiries by mail and requests for photographic services swelled to a flood threatening to engulf the staff. The acknowledgments to Jackson and the library in innumerable articles, monographs, dissertations, books, and editions on a bewildering variety of subjects provide additional evidence, if more is needed, of the importance of his achievement.

The funds available to him were limited by subject as well as in amount, which led to periodic intramural encounters that were thoroughly enjoyed by all participants. For some years, until their retirement, the two Gertrudes—Miss Shaw and Miss Sullivan—ran the Order Department in Widener and were in charge of assigning funds to all purchases. Rare book purchasing being the irregular thing it is, the librarian cannot simply count on buying so many dollars’ worth of this subject or that. The books must be acquired as they can be found, a circumstance that frequently involves pounding a slightly squarish peg into a somewhat rounded hole.

Every two weeks or, in slack times, once a month, Jackson would display his new acquisitions to the two Gertrudes and exercise all his salesmanship to “sell” them to such funds as were available. Some funds were so restricted as to be difficult, and he naturally tried to push acquisitions into them before exhausting “easy” funds of more general
application. The resulting debates sometimes developed into gales of laughter as he expounded new theories of flexibility for the Degrand Fund ("for French science") or exhibited this technicality or that to justify other dispositions. At last all would be amicably settled and Miss Shaw would enter the date and fund in pencil in her neat hand on the verso of each title page. When she and Miss Sullivan retired, Jackson began to do all his own funding and these friendly book-flyings came to an end; but they were sorely missed.

The United States entered World War II just before the Houghton Library officially opened, and the war quickly brought changes. Both staff and readers dwindled. Philip Hofer temporarily crossed the river to the Business School, acting as Assistant Dean to relieve a regular staff member who departed for government service. In 1945 Jackson himself made a goodwill tour of South American libraries under the auspices of the State Department, but most of the time he remained in Cambridge looking after the affairs of the Library.

Because of the war, many of the overseas sources of ordinary current library material — periodicals and the like — were cut off. Keyes D. Metcalf wisely made the funds so released available to Jackson, so that temporarily he had command of greatly increased purchasing power. At the same time unusual opportunities arose and competition from other purchasers diminished. For example, Jackson learned that one of the stately homes of England was reinforcing its windows against blast with sacks full of the family library, and negotiated to purchase the books at a rate that more than permitted replacing them with sandbags — actually about two dollars a volume. Tears of bitter envy may be shed by present-day librarians upon learning that these were mostly S.T.C. and Wing period books in decent, though not flashy, bindings.

Some big ones also got away. Good books came up in periods of financial drought, near the end of the Library's fiscal year, and donors could not always be found. In 1945 there was a chance to acquire the entire remainder of Sir Thomas Phillipps's manuscripts, numbering some 12,000 items. Philip and Lionel Robinson, the London book dealers, were negotiating with the trustees of the estate for their purchase, and offered to turn them over to Harvard for a modest commission. The sum was large, though not impossible; but Jackson had not yet learned all the ins and outs of raising money. Furthermore, by the greatest of bad luck he was in the midst of his South American tour.
when the negotiations reached a crisis, and the collection was lost. In the event, the Robinsons purchased the collection on their own account. Harvard along with other libraries and collectors has been buying individual items from it ever since, by private treaty and in the apparently endless series of auction sales it has provided.

It may seem wrong-headed to record a lost cause, but as Jackson rightly said, a good bookman is never able to forget the books that have escaped his grasp, no matter what the reason. And it illustrates, as vividly as do all the successes spread in his annual reports, the way that he positively welcomed a great challenge when it offered a worthy goal.

Meantime his scholarly work did not flag. He kept quantities of notes on all kinds of bibliographical points and topics, and from time to time prepared articles based on his findings for journals or Festschriften. They by no means all concerned books of the S.T.C. period, though these remained his greatest interest. Latterly his papers were mainly directed to the Harvard Library Bulletin, which printed sixteen of his contributions during its fourteen-year span. A major work, Records of the Court of the Stationers’ Company 1602 to 1640, an edition with exhaustive notes of the hitherto unpublished Court Book C, was issued by the Bibliographical Society in 1957. His annual reports, which he faced each winter with ever-louder groans, were also as scholarly as he could make them, considering the number and variety of entries in each and the relatively cramped space at his disposal. He devoted many hours of the most concentrated toil to the task of transforming the dry bones of the accessions records provided by his staff into the enticing account that was eagerly read by bookmen all over the world.

His great work, however, was that in which he was associated with Dr. F. S. Ferguson: the revision of the Short-title Catalogue, which really began with the publication of the S.T.C. in 1926 and occupied more and more of his time and thought as the years went by. Ferguson had seen and collated most of the early English books that passed through the London market for many years, and had collected and indexed printers’ marks, compartments, initials, and the like. When he


He joined the Society in 1932 and became its Hon. Secretary for America in 1936.
retired from the firm of Quaritch, he continued at a desk reserved for him in the stacks of the British Museum, and he made a weekly trip to the Bodleian to check points on S.T.C. books. Jackson, for his part, visited collection after collection on both sides of the Atlantic, recording what he saw. He assumed responsibility for consolidating and organizing the enormous mass of information, and the manuscript took shape in his office.

Scholarly librarians and collectors all over the world bore a hand with unstinting help through correspondence. It would be unfair to single out a few — their full roster will appear in the finished work — but one should surely be named here: the late L. W. Hanson of the Bodleian, an old and dear personal friend of Jackson's as well as a powerful supporter of the revised S.T.C. Hanson took the lead in the Council of the Bibliographical Society to insure the continuity of work on the S.T.C. after Jackson's untimely death.

The original S.T.C. was largely based on printed catalogues and secondary sources; the revision, as far as possible, on personal examination of the books themselves. As a result, ghosts were laid, duplications eliminated, anonymous printers identified, and the whole corpus of information immensely refined in many ways. Titles, editions, and issues were discovered and differentiated. The new S.T.C. will add some 10,000 entries to the 26,000 in the original, and between two and three thousand of these will be new titles.

At Jackson's death in October, 1964, the revision had reached the letter R. For the remainder, his notes are full and usable; with the cooperation of Dr. F. S. Ferguson and in the hands of Miss Katharine Pantzer, the latest of Jackson's research assistants, the work proceeds, with the completed text expected by 1970. At every stage the information so painstakingly gathered has been at the disposal of all scholars wishing to consult it, with a freedom typifying the way Jackson shared his fund of knowledge with all competent inquirers.

During his lifetime the eminence of his scholarship received public recognition in honorary degrees from Williams College (A.M., 1938), Harvard (L.H.D., 1962) and Oxford (Litt.D., 1964); a fellowship in the Society of Antiquaries, London; and memberships in the Massachusetts Historical Society, the American Antiquarian Society, and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. In 1946 he was nominated for the Presidency of the Bibliographical Society of America, of which — as everyone was astonished to learn — he was not yet a
member. He joined, was elected, and served as President for two years. In 1958 the Stationers’ Company of London honored him with their medal, and he was posthumously awarded the Gold Medal of the Bibliographical Society, London, perhaps the highest honor in the world of books.

The bibliography course at Harvard absorbed much of his thought and effort. Its format and syllabus were entirely of his own devising. Composed mainly of graduate students in the English Department, it met once a week through both terms of the academic year in a two-hour session with a short break for tea and a cigarette.

All students were expected to master McKerrow’s Introduction to Bibliography as rapidly as possible. With that as a common background of information, Jackson launched into the bibliographical stratosphere in all directions. The baptism of fire was immediate: his customary inaugural lecture, “Linked and Unlinked Books,” was sufficiently different from anything else the class had ever heard to bring them to a pitch of attention that never slackened through the year.

Enrollment was limited to ten or twelve at most, and some years it was much smaller. Each session revolved about a special topic: signatures, cancels, collation, provenance, type identification, and the like. Jackson’s remarks were generally informal, based partly on outline notes but mostly on actual examples chosen from Harvard collections. He would demonstrate each book in turn, then pass it about the table for the students to see at close range. No one could forget the experience of seeing this procession of fascinating books with perhaps the best guide in the world standing by to explain and illuminate.

Each member also had to take part in composing and printing a short text edited by the class, producing a series of pamphlets greatly treasured by those who had worked on them, and providing actual printing experience more valuable than any textbook. A high point of each year was an invitation from the Jacksons to cocktails and a buffet supper, after which all hands sat about the dining-room table to stitch the pamphlets into their covers. The size of Jackson’s martinis was matched only by their excellence, and these combined with Mrs. Jackson’s savory casseroles to produce a glow seldom experienced by the hard-working denizens of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences.

The course regularly concluded with the presentation of an hour-long paper by each member, sometimes representing the bibliograph-
ical chapter of a doctoral dissertation but more often on a problem assigned by Jackson. Frequently these developed into publishable form and found their way to the pages of some bibliographical journal, guided there by the good offices of the instructor, who was generous with praise and support whenever he thought it was deserved.

From time to time, with the help of others in the Library, he also gave undergraduate courses designed to encourage embryo book-collectors. These courses never seemed to enjoy a success comparable to his graduate course or to the earlier course in which George Parker Winship nurtured so many future friends of the Library. The fields of collecting practical for an undergraduate had certainly changed since Winship's day; almost as certainly the temper of the undergraduate body had changed as well. Whatever the reason, Jackson worried about it. He was concerned to have the Library reach as many facets of university life as possible. In his last year he devoted much thought and effort to planning a wholly new course on the history of the book, intended for the program in General Education. It was to treat books as a vehicle of art and a medium for the communication of literature, thought, and history to later generations. The course was launched in the autumn of 1964, but unhappily he did not live to see its completion.

Jackson did much to strengthen the link between the Library and the faculty, even as Mr. Metcalf had predicted when advocating his appointment. He encouraged teachers to bring their classes in and expose them to the dramatic impact of primary source materials; he staged exhibitions tied to academic meetings and courses; he was always ready to provide bibliographical expertise and advice at need, or to draw upon his wide personal acquaintance to smooth the way for Harvard scholars wishing to consult the great libraries of the world.

His appointment carried faculty standing. From the beginning he met the Harvard community with ease on its own ground, and not merely when the topic was books and manuscripts. The first day that he entered the dining-room of the Faculty Club for lunch he saw no familiar face, so he sat unbidden at the table immediately to the right of the entrance. Long custom had hallowed that table to the use of archaeologists and anthropologists, but he did not know it. Shortly the anthropologists arrived; Jackson found their professional conversation as agreeable as they came to find his. For twenty-five years he was a welcome member of their company, lunching with them more often than not. It may not be sheer coincidence that after his death a
Harvard archaeologist took his place as President of the Club of Odd Volumes.

In his relations with his colleagues, his staff, his extramural friends, and his students, Jackson observed the same high standards he brought to his work. Unswervingly loyal, he expected the same loyalty in return. He was unsparing of himself in the time and intensity he devoted to his scholarly duties, and he could not help showing at least slight disappointment when his colleagues did not work as hard and as long as he did. Since he would forgo food, sleep, and even cigarettes to complete a self-assigned task, and regarded weekends and holidays as a time to work all the harder because no visitors would interrupt, most of his colleagues at least occasionally experienced twinges of inadequacy.

He was intolerant of dishonesty in any form, and he was absolutely enraged by double-dealing. He seldom could bear confrontation with stupidity. Occasionally a student or a reader in the Library would be simply unable to grasp a bibliographical point or procedure. One such session was enough to bring Jackson to a boil. Thereafter he generally begged some other member of the staff to deal with visits of the unwitting offender; he knew that another interview would probably make him lose his temper completely. When irritated by incompetence or stupidity, his rage was impressive, and some never recovered from exposure to it.

Jackson placed a special value on his association with the last vestiges of male society in an equal-suffrage world. He regarded his membership in the Senior Common Room of Lincoln College, Oxford, presided over by his old friend Walter Oakeshott, as a great privilege and a pleasure. He took pride in belonging to the Athenaeum in London, the Century Association and the Grolier Club in New York, the Club of Odd Volumes and the Tavern Club in Boston, and he particularly relished the semi-annual journeys of the Walpole Society, among whose members were many of his closest friends. The Walpole's emphasis upon fine food and drink accorded completely with his ideas of the amenities of life. A sideline in the investigations during his student trip to Europe had been a note-taking tour of the wine countries, and he never lost his intense interest in a good table and a sound cellar. After a Walpole expedition, colleagues were always regaled with an account of menus and vintages only slightly less detailed than that of any good books seen en route.
Books represent only one small facet of the Walpole Society's concern with antiquities, but the purest bibliophily was promised by his election in 1964 to the Roxburghe Club, the senior book collectors' club of the English-speaking world. Its foundation dates from the Roxburghe sale of 1812, which the leading collectors of Great Britain, organized by the Reverend Thomas Frognall Dibdin, decided to commemorate by forming a society.

Only a few Americans have been elected to this small circle. There was a peculiar fitness in having a Dibdinian association crown Jackson's career, as it might be said to have opened it with his Grolier Club address of more than thirty years before. The one meeting of the Roxburghe Club that he was fated to attend was possibly the highlight of his last trip to England in the summer of 1964. It was held at Cambridge with Lord Rothschild as host. Jackson brought back to the other Cambridge glowing accounts of the meeting and banquet held in Trinity College Library. Election to the Roxburghe, coming in the same year as his honorary degree from Oxford, represented all that he valued most highly in the world of books and men.

Although he certainly preferred male conversation, no one could be more charming and courtly with the ladies than Jackson. And when he could be persuaded to turn from Topic No. 1 (books and collections) to the rest of the world, his conversation lost none of its sparkle and no one could be a livelier companion. For many years the anniversary of the dedication of the Houghton Library was celebrated by the staff with a square dance in the Exhibition Room. While younger colleagues retired to chairs to rest their feet and mop their brows, Jackson would still be on the floor, dancing every dance with vigor and grace.

Despite his sedentary occupation, Jackson also relished outdoor activity. Each summer he cruised for ten days or two weeks off the coast of Maine with his dear friends, David and Stephen Wheatland, in Steve's boat, the Ninfhus. Starting from Sorrento in Frenchman's Bay, they would usually sail still further down east, dropping anchor in small harbors by night to bring together fresh-caught native lobsters with the vintage wines Jackson had selected in Boston. He would return, deeply tanned and relaxed, ready for the new academic year. These cruises extended in an unbroken series for twenty-four years. The important part they played in his life was properly commemorated in the citation for his Oxford D. Litt., which spoke of him as one "qui
tamen non modo lepidi libelli sed etiam phaseli celeris amore doctum
Catullum aemulatur."

When he could find time, he loved to tramp through such parts of
the New England forests and mountains as were relatively unspoiled,
sometimes camping with his son. At the Library he was surrounded
by birdwatchers, chief among them G. W. Cottrell, Jr., briefly his
assistant before becoming editor of the Harvard Library Bulletin.
Since he respected mastery of a subject, even if it was not books, Jack-
son viewed Cottrell’s ornithological pursuits with something more
than tolerance. But he was less tolerant of those who simply went
along for the ride. Sometimes he and Mrs. Jackson accompanied the
Cottrells on the annual expedition of an irregular group called the
Pawtuckaway Mountain Bird Club, some of whom knew something
about birds and some of whom did not. For one such trip Cottrell
borrowed a stuffed tropical bird from the Museum of Comparative
Zoology and Jackson planted it in a tree at some distance from the
proposed route of the explorers. His delight was unbounded at the
astonishment and puzzlement of those not in on the secret and not
sufficiently expert to recognize the hoax.

In fact, a boyish sense of humor was an important part of Jackson’s
temperament. He relished jokes ranging from the broadly practical
to the highly sophisticated, even when the laugh was at his own ex-
 pense.

One such joke that he did not relish quite as much as others began
with the receipt by mail of a letter from an unfamiliar writer who said
he had a lot of old books and wondered if they were worth anything.
Unwilling to ship such bulky objects, he enclosed the title-pages
which he had torn out for the purpose—title-pages of a dozen or so
S.T.C. books, one of them bearing an unrecorded imprint. Every
effort to get in touch with the sender was unavailing, and the effect
was even more maddening when a second lot of title-pages arrived a
week later. After that, silence; and not until after Jackson’s death did
the perpetrator reveal himself as a New York book dealer who had
accumulated bits and scraps of defective books with just such a prac-
tical joke in mind. His exploit is immortalized, if obscurely, in the
revised S.T.C., which will record the variant title-page for which no
complete book is known to exist.

Jackson’s own humor was often displayed at the weekly meetings
of the male staff, whom he banded together under the title of the
Collation Club. The Club met (as it still does) every Tuesday at 12.30 for sherry in his office and then adjourned to the Faculty Club for lunch. Conversation was informal and sometimes the meetings were further enlivened by some guest from the book world. The only time a dreadful silence fell was on those occasions when Jackson hopefully called for volunteers to mount a new exhibition.

During the summer of 1950 when he and his wife were in England, a kind of madness seized his stay-at-home staff. They leagued together to produce a burlesque library report, vying with each other to invent absurd but appropriate items. Entitled The Haughton Library Report of Accessions for the Year 1949–50, it was well larded with the very phrases Jackson habitually used in his serious reports. It was printed by the Harvard Printing Office with identical typography. Instead of the usual Veritas shield, the cover bore a device drawn by Fernando Zobel, symbolizing the Collation Club.

In a small formal meeting of the Club immediately on his return, Hofer placed the first copy in Jackson’s hand with a short speech to the effect that it had been done to spare him the effort of composing his usual report. Jackson’s jaw dropped momentarily; but he soon began to chuckle and then to roar with laughter as he read the whole report aloud. He took it for the compliment it was meant to be, but he later admitted that it made him terribly self-conscious in writing his next reports.

In a curious way the “Haughton Report” typified the deep respect and affection in which Jackson was held by his staff. His ideas and ideals of professionalism pervaded the Library and encouraged a vigorous esprit de corps. It was a privilege to be associated with him, even in a minor capacity, in the development, growth, and maintenance of the Houghton Library.

But greater by far than his impact on any person or group of persons was his permanent effect on the Harvard College Library. He arrived in Cambridge superbly equipped, at a crucial moment in the Library’s history. It was the last gasp for many important lines of collecting. He saw what had to be done and he did it to the utmost limit of his energy and ability. Before his death on October 18, 1964, he had seen the growth of the collections for which he was responsible matched by their enormously increased use by scholars. It will take years for the resources he added to the Library to be truly known and appreciated by the academic community at Harvard and in the learned world at


215
large; and these resources will, quite literally, never be exhausted. It is a weighty responsibility for those who may follow him to conserve the collections he brought together, to maintain the momentum and direction of the collecting he inaugurated, and to continue the humane administration he established.

To a great extent this brief memoir is based on the acquaintance and friendship of subject and writer over a period of twenty-five years. I first came to know Jackson through taking his bibliography course as a graduate student in 1939–1940. Immediately after World War II, in March, 1946, I began eighteen years of close association as a member of the staff of the Houghton Library. Much, therefore, is derived from personal recollection; much, also, from conversation with friends and colleagues. Mrs. Jackson kindly gave me access to various personal papers, including family letters and diaries, and I have naturally made free use of the office files in the Library.

But this does not pretend to approach a full-scale biography. Selectivity and inadvertence have each played a part in my account. No one is more conscious than I of anecdotes and occurrences that might well have found a place in it; of great acquisitions that are not mentioned; of numerous associates, benefactors, and even close friends who are not so much as named. Jackson himself would have been the first to give full credit to them for their friendship and support.