

HENRY WATSON KENT

RESOLUTION BY THE TRUSTEES

It is with profound regret that the Trustees have noted the death on the twenty-eighth of August, 1948, of Henry Watson Kent, Secretary Emeritus of the Museum.

Born in Boston, September 28, 1866, Mr. Kent joined the staff of the Museum in 1905 as Assistant Secretary after notable service with the Slater Memorial Museum of the Norwich Free Academy and the Library of the Grolier Club. In 1913 he was elected Secretary to the Board of Trustees, to which post he brought indefatigable energy and balanced wisdom until his retirement in 1940. His activities over the years laid foundations which have become standard practice among all the museums of this country and many abroad. His most noteworthy contributions were in the fields of museum education and the relation of art to in-

dustry; of museum organization, cataloguing, registering, photographing; and, perhaps above all, in the whole range of museum printing and publications. In these respects he created his own memorial and his name will be revered by countless museum workers for decades to come. Our loss is one shared by many in learned and artistic circles.

To us who were closer to him and who owe his memory an even larger debt—increased by his kindness, his courtesy, and his widespread knowledge—it seems not unfitting to apply to the volume of Mr. Kent's life these words from the autobiographical epitaph of one of his spiritual forebears: "But the work shall not be lost; for it will (as he believ'd) appear once more in a new and more elegant edition revised and corrected by the author."

AN APPRECIATION

BY WINIFRED E. HOWE

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The years of Henry W. Kent's life coincided with the years of The Metropolitan Museum of Art from the first suggestion of founding a museum, made at a Fourth of July dinner of Americans in Paris in 1866. It may be said that the same eighty-odd years cover broadly the history of art museums in America, a development in which it would be hard to overestimate the value of Mr. Kent's influence. The writer can count a full dozen museums in whose formation or building plans he was actively consulted as an expert. He was frequently appealed to for sound and discerning counsel in the appointment of directors or in other administrative problems. He himself was offered important posts elsewhere while he was at the Metropolitan Museum. Last May the American Association of Museums, meeting in Boston, bestowed upon him its award for distinguished service to the cause of museum education. The accompanying citation calls Mr. Kent "an esteemed

and beloved standard bearer of the finest and noblest aspirations of a museum man." That he was; he bore that standard for twelve years as the first Curator of the Slater Memorial Museum of Norwich Free Academy and for over thirty-five years at the Metropolitan Museum, where he attained to the greatest fulfillment of his aspirations as a museum man.

For these important positions Mr. Kent's training was not obtained from any course of study planned by older heads—courses are now available, partly because he stressed the need for such advantages and outlined the subjects to be taught. It is true that in his teens he had been a member of the first class to receive instruction in librarianship, held at Columbia College under the direction of Melvil Dewey, its new librarian; and to his early preoccupation with "Library Economy," Dewey's special emphasis, may be traced what has often been regarded as Mr. Kent's greatest service to Amer-

ican museums, his creating at the Metropolitan Museum an efficient administrative system, a Museum Economy if you please, which was widely followed by other institutions. Except for this guided study and practice his learning was self-directed. One fruitful winter while he was the Curator in Norwich he was free to travel abroad and to study European museums. Delighting in their collections and in Greek temples and Byzantine architecture, he concerned himself primarily with the things that a museum man needs to know—lighting, backgrounds, details of display, cases, labels, publications, and whatever adds to the convenience, profit, and pleasure of visitors. He returned to America with notebooks filled with sketches and notes that stood him in good stead for years.

At the Metropolitan Museum his title was Secretary of the Board of Trustees. The specific duties of that office—writing minutes, keeping files, preparing notices and agenda, answering letters—he performed with promptitude, orderly care, and “constructive foresight”; but his activities went far beyond the traditional tasks of a secretary, as a list of now familiar features of museum organization that he conceived and initiated shows: the card catalogue of the collections, the Museum *Bulletin*, the Museum Press, the editorial division, the information desk, the photographic studio, and the lending collections. As the Metropolitan’s first Supervisor of Museum Instruction he planned and for eighteen years directed many of the present educational services. He recognized the resources of the Museum for the art industries and put into operation a program that made them available to manufacturers and designers according to their needs. In all these ways he was fulfilling the purposes of the Founders as expressed in the Charter, which he so often quoted, but in terms required by changed conditions. Regarding himself, and indeed every staff member in a public museum, as a public servant, he was seeking effective ways of rendering service. He constantly subjected his own

work and that of the organization to severe examination, but withal he was liberal in his appreciation of the good work of others, friendly and sympathetic with the workers.

A significant example of the way in which he made his knowledge and wisdom, his discriminating taste and high standards, his interests and enthusiasms, his associations and friendships, all contribute to the advantage of the Museum is found in his pioneering in early American decorative arts and his friendship with the first collectors of these, two things that were directly responsible for the chain of events that ended in the American Wing; he imbued Mr. and Mrs. Robert W. deForest with his interest and the rest followed. Mr. deForest recognized this when he said at the opening of the Wing: “Mr. Henry W. Kent was in at the beginning. Indeed, he was in before the beginning, because it was largely his vision that helped to inspire this whole enterprise. Except for Mr. Kent, we never would have had such a Hudson-Fulton Exhibition as we had. Except for Mr. Kent, we probably would never have had the Bolles Collection here. And Mr. Kent has been in this with his whole heart right straight through to the end.”

One summer Mr. Kent, taking his holiday in England, was greatly impressed with the memorial at the Winchester School to the boys who died in the First World War. The quotation used was the passing over of Mr. Valiant-for-Truth from *Pilgrim’s Progress*. On his return to New York he had this printed in Centaur type by the Museum Press as a broadside, and one of these, framed, hung for years in the editorial office. There is no more appropriate ending for this appreciation. It reads: “My sword I give to him that shall succeed me in my pilgrimage, and my courage and skill to him that can get it. My marks and scars I carry with me, to be a witness for me that I have fought his battles who now will be my rewarder. So he passed over, and all the trumpets sounded for him on the other side.”