

ANNALS OF IOWA.

EDITORIAL DEPARTMENT

"* * * When he [Mr. Aldrich] closed his desk, for the last time, there were within it manuscripts * * * some editorials and much material undeveloped or in outline. * * * It will be the purpose of the writer, who has been appointed Acting Curator * * * to continue the form of the journal identical with that preceding the death of Mr. Aldrich, and make use of such material * * *. If any deviation shall be made it will be in the number closing the volume [which may] include all * * * communications * * * incident to Mr. Aldrich's death.

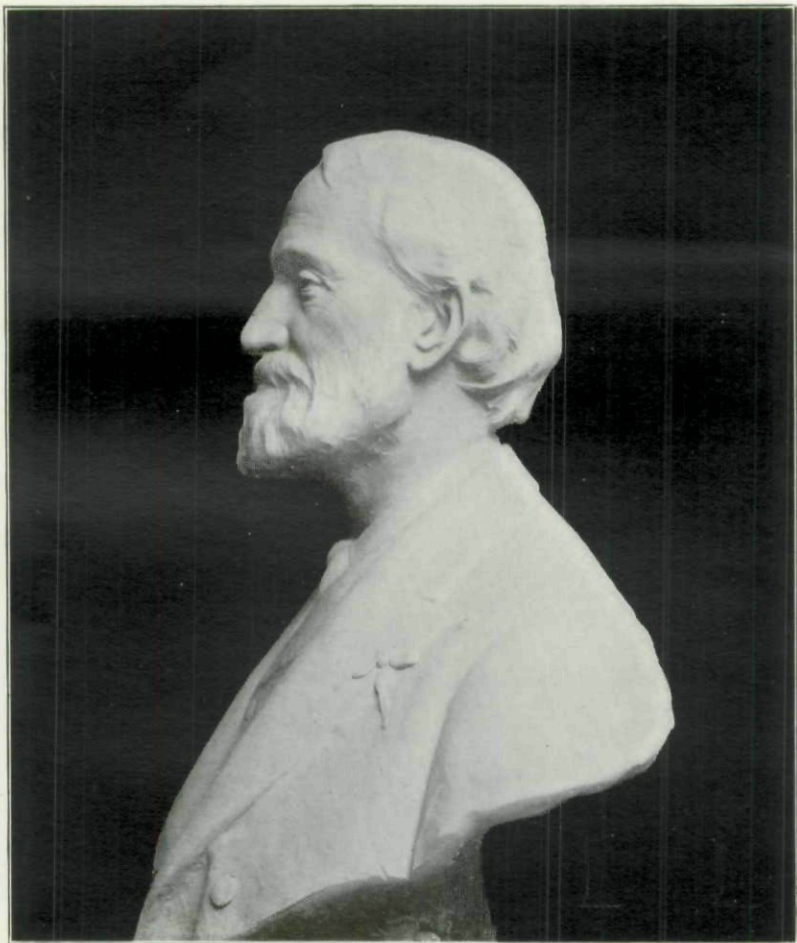
EDGAR R. HARLAN."

(*Annals of Iowa, Third Series, Vol. 8, P. 385.*)

Honored with the implicit confidence of Charles Aldrich, one loved him as a man and acquired an inspiration from his work. Official associates could not so judiciously compose a valedictory upon his labors as may those who bore with him no other burdens. Of the hosts of volunteers remaining by his side the last few years, none stood more closely than Doctor Frank I. Herriott, to whose appreciation yields the Notable Deaths feature and other customary editorial matter in this number. Nothing could more fitly close the volume.—E. R. H.

CHARLES ALDRICH.

Much has been said—and fittingly said—of what Charles Aldrich accomplished. His services to his fellows as an editor, soldier, statesman, and especially as the Conservator of Iowa's history elicited, during his life and on his death, the plaudits of men of light and leading in our Commonwealth. As the years increase the worth of his work will be appreciated more and more, and the greater will be his meed. To those, however, who enjoyed more than a passing acquaintance with Mr. Aldrich what he achieved, the records or results of his work remaining, while noteworthy as the world measures success, are minor or secondary in their memory. His deeds and successes were merely indices to the character of the man that most attracted them.



Marble Bust of Mr. Aldrich in State Historical Building.
From the Studio of Messrs. Pugi, Florence, Italy

So many men of vasty reputations shrink and shrivel on close acquaintance. In the rounds and stress of the matter-of-fact they are discovered to be inadequate, contracted, mean, petty; fuss and fustian, hypocrisy and pretense constitutes so much of the groundwork of their lives and reputations; and familiarity breeds contempt. Such was not the case with Charles Aldrich. He had, like all the descendants of the recreant Adam, his eccentricities and shortcomings, his faults and his foibles, but these in the main were defects of his virtues, phases of his strength. Those who knew him best, especially those who saw him in the harness, particularly those who worked with him—not on dress parade when the applause of the forum and the market place makes men gracious and considerate but in the dull grey days when the prosaic tasks of life's routine with the pull and tug of petty trials and the grit of aggravations try patience and test metal—such familiars held him in esteem. More, respect and affection compassed their admiration of the man.

The public realized in some measure the results of his activities; but outside the circle of his close friends and acquaintances few appreciated the charm and force of his personality. The nature of his influence was now and then partially apprehended when a stroke from his pen would stir the public mind and anon men in high places would move in harmony with his wishes and later the agencies and machinery of the government would operate in the accomplishment of his day dreams and sanguine hopes. But the public saw comparatively little of the man. He was not much in evidence. He was seldom or never found at the crossroads disputing with men and none heard him shrieking his sentiments from the housetops. He hardly ever was seen among the "front benchers." He could not or would not attempt to make "speeches." And in the last ten years of his life—the period of the fruition of his hopes—he seemed to shrink from public demonstration—a practice not uncommon with the select souls who conceive large projects and secure their realization.

Of the great Corsican a saying goes: "Napoleon was not a man—he was a system." Persons not intimately acquainted

with Charles Aldrich, contemplating the tangible results of his work and the honors that came to him e'er his frail body was taken on its last journey will naturally conclude that he, too, was some sort of a "system" rather than a man, which, glacier-like, moved forward in the accomplishment of his designs with inscrutable, relentless, all-compelling force.

On our capitol hill stands a beautiful and stately structure. Within its spacious halls and vaults the people's archives and the large and increasing treasures of our State's history are now safe-guarded against moth and rust and reckless loss. Such ample, not to say, splendid provision for the preservation of the historic lore and public records of the Commonwealth are not forthcoming simply on the suggestion and the mere asking. Legislators, when first appealed to for funds, are wont to be indifferent or reluctant. It requires earnest, systematic effort and concentration of decided public interest upon the guardians of the people's purse in order to secure their favor and support. Usually there is considerable evidence of a "literary bureau" and not infrequently signs of the existence of what both profane and pious persons call a "machine" or "organization" whereby popular interest is generated and aggressive public opinion is manufactured, assembled and co-ordinated so as to be efficient, that is coercive.

The creator of the great Historical Collections of Wisconsin, Lyman C. Draper, labored and garnered at Madison from 1852 to 1887 with irrepressible ardor. When he began he had an interstate reputation as a collector of precious manuscripts; he had back of him constantly a large and influential Historical Society of scholars and citizens "all gentlemen of prominence throughout the State"; he had also the hearty collateral support of the administrative and instructional staff and Alumni of a great University; from the beginning the legislature of Wisconsin "looked kindly on the undertaking" and with a "few notable exceptions" harmony prevailed; with cellars, stack rooms, cubby holes, and garrets bursting with his precious accumulations he began in 1881 a systematic campaign for a suitable separate building; he had the "unanimous support of the newspaper editors"—yet his bill wrecked amidst "complications"; he resigned in 1887 and on August

26, 1891, he died, "his great ambition unattained, his Carcassonne unreached"; and in 1894 his distinguished successor declared that "the most immediate need of the Society is a new, commodious, fire-proof building—"and that plans were then maturing for securing legislative appropriation for its construction. It was not until 1900 that the Historical Society of Wisconsin found itself in its present magnificent quarters.

Strange indeed the contrast in the career of Charles Aldrich. It was not until 1884 that he offered his Collections of Autographs, mementos and valuable papers to the trustees of the State Library of Iowa, on condition that they should be adequately cared for. Although accepted the care given was insufficient and in order to prevent the failure of his design and the loss of his precious collections he was obliged in 1888 to come to Des Moines to look after them personally "for no one else would do the work," which meanwhile he had carried on at considerable personal expense. When Mr. Aldrich undertook the practical work he had no celebrity among scholars; his reputation was confined by the borders of the State. He had no learned society or university at his back and enthusiastically supporting and furthering his plans. His old friends and fellow workers of the press gave him kindly support but the people at large, while perhaps friendly after a vague fashion, were not energetic promoters of his project. In truth, indifference was the most conspicuous fact he encountered. Nevertheless, after he took actual hold, developments were steady and rapid. In 1888 Gov. William Larabee demonstrated his personal interest and official favor and the legislature made an appropriation of \$500 per annum for the upkeep of the collection. In 1890 Gov. Horace Boies gave it another lift and \$1,500 per annum for two years was granted for its exhibition and enlargement. Finally in 1892 his plans were substantially recognized; special quarters in the basement of the Capitol and an annual appropriation of \$6,000 were given, and provision made for the first time for his salary and for clerical help. In 1896, the legislature admitted that a separate building was needed for his collections and

\$25,000 was appropriated for the purchase of a site and architectural plans. Increased provision was made in 1898 and on May 17, 1899, surrounded by the notables of the State, many of them statesmen of fame in the nation, the recipient of the congratulations of friends and universal good-will, Charles Aldrich witnessed the laying of the corner-stone of the present Historical Building, and from March, 1900, to the day of his death he had the supreme satisfaction of doing his work within its walls, wherein the public appropriately did their last honors to his mortal remains on March 11, 1908. The conclusion that the late Curator was of the Napoleonic type would seem to follow.

Charles Aldrich, however, was not a Napoleon. He was neither a "system" nor a domineering person; nor did he possess, nor did he strive to exercise, any fell influence over men's minds. He was a man, fashioned in the common mould; but a man surcharged with an intense vitality, whence his light and energy. He was a veritable dynamo that generated currents of high potential which flashed forth ideas that secured attention and energized his fellows into action. Senator Harlan, as early as 1858, discovered that Charles Aldrich was a "potent citizen." Although small of stature and slender in structure he was in the prime of his powers, a tireless worker. Mentally he was more than ordinarily alert and acute. He had a ready and tenacious memory and an incisive, picturesque, racy style of expression that caused his utterances to be widely quoted.

In the heyday of his journalistic career, from 1857 to 1880, he was a vigorous fighter for any measure he espoused and especially for any friend or champion he supported. His opposition to the county judge system from 1858 to 1860, his advocacy of anti-pass legislation in 1882 and his promotion of the political careers of Governors James W. Grimes and Cyrus C. Carpenter was downright and outright and efficacious. He took his coat off and did the field work that determines the fate of men and measures in politics. He fought hard and in the clash of conflict his pen would often cut to the quick, sometimes with a slashing stroke. Friends and opponents knew exactly what to expect. But while he was ardent and

generous on behalf of his friends and gave his opponents no peace until victory was assured or the fates decreed otherwise, he was not malevolent. He had a long memory for personal injuries; but he never let malice prompt him to do injury even to those who had done him a wrong. In those years of journalistic life he made the hosts of friends and gained the respect and good-will of editors and political leaders who inform the public and more or less create public opinion which controls legislative action. Herein was the main secret of his later success. He had the working confidence of the public who controlled the State's affairs.

In carrying on his campaign for popular and legislative support for the Historical collections he developed no "system." Friends and enemies were not listed on a card index nor was a credit and debit account carefully kept. There was no "literary bureau" that regularly sent out "literature" and "personal letters" in mimeograph and stereotype, designed to arouse friends and enlist new supporters. They were not systematically coddled or placated by the various modes of showing distinguished consideration. He delighted to give visitors and friends souvenirs of the work he or the Historical Department was doing; but it was a spontaneous expression of a generous nature, often indicated in a naive, childlike fashion. He wrote here and there as circumstances suggested. He was always on the alert to enlist friends for his work. He never went any place, nor met any one, but the alpha and omega of his conversation was the welfare of the Historical Department and its collections. It was his happiness and his method to urge the public, rich and poor, all and sundry, to visit the Library and Portrait Gallery and Museum and personally to act the part of guide and demonstrator, for he knew that once the nature of the work he had so much at heart was realized, public interest would soon provide adequate support. But it was Charles Aldrich himself who spoke to them—not a bureau or system or machine.

When the legislature was in session he hardly ever concentrated any forces upon the members of that body. His old friends and co-workers in the Pioneer Lawmakers' Associa-

tion, constituted his only flying squadron, and indeed they were virtually his only organized troops—but their sessions once in two years seldom lasted more than two days. He spoke to as many members as he could, but he wasted little time seeking after all of them. He dealt chiefly with the leaders who could influence the result decisively. And in this particular Charles Aldrich was a master craftsman in the lobby. He had a keen eye for strategic points. He knew whom to see and especially whom to avoid. He knew what to say and what not to say. He was earnest, adroit, direct and courteous. The vigor and vivacity of his speech gained easily the right of way for his plea and won recruits. No sharp practice, no dubious diplomacy into which men in the eager pursuit of legislative support are so much tempted to engage that entail ghosts and ugly complications that rise later to plague, characterized his course of procedure. He gained his points usually by direct frontal attacks; and it is little short of astonishing that he secured his results with no resort to the minor maneuvers of the lobby on which most men so commonly depend. But those who recall his resistance to political assessments and his discharge of assistants or employes despite the adverse influence of high potentialities of party politics and his employment of one who became his most trusted assistant in the face of a possible collision with the chief executive himself know that his courage and nerve were staunch.

It will be difficult for those who saw and knew casually the frail figure of Mr. Aldrich during the last ten years of his life, his delicate frame racked by frequent paroxysms of bronchial affliction, to realize that he was a master of tactics and strategy long before he achieved his last great triumph. His career had been one long training in diplomacy and procedure in dealing with public bodies. He had four times been Clerk of the House of Representatives of the State from 1860 to 1870. When the land titles of the pioneers in the upper reaches of the Des Moines valley were controverted and ouster was the fate of the settlers, Mr. Aldrich was one of those sent to Washington to examine into and secure their equities; and he was probably the chief factor in securing the passage of

the remedial act of Congress, approved March 3, 1873. President Grant signified appreciation of his services by appointing him upon the National Commission of three, created to make a further investigation of the perplexing issues. In 1877 he was employed by the Illinois Central railroad in a task that indicated the high estimate placed upon his ability and address by great Captains of Industry. The iron clad provisions of the Iowa law governing railroad traffic rates known as "the Granger Law" had become a grievous obstacle to railroads. Retrogression had set in and ruin was imminent, if it and like laws in other States were not liberalized. Mr. Aldrich was asked to go east and arouse a sentiment for such modification. His visits to New York, Boston and other eastern centers were so successful that he exceeded all expectations of those employing him and soon had even the "prairies on fire" in the west. He had hardly returned to Iowa when he was called east again at the request of friends of Dr. Wm. A. Hammond, Surgeon General of the army during the civil war, whose career, on a collision with the irascible, autocratic Stanton, had been summarily closed by court-martial and dismissal from the service. Mr. Aldrich was asked to take sole charge of a bill restoring him to his rank and honors. Again he scored in 1878 a distinguished success. His last great success in creating the Historical Department and securing a library building for it, was not, therefore, an accident, nor a stroke of luck, nor a matter merely of plotting and persistence. It was the achievement of a man with a good cause who rapidly won men over to his support by the vigor of his appeal and the avoidance of faulty procedure.

Mr. Aldrich was both a strategist and tactician of high order. He knew that he could do but little in legislative halls unless public opinion was back of him; and much of his effort was expended in creating a state of mind favorable to his plans. Here again his method was direct personal work. He contributed largely to the pages of his old friends of the press in various parts of the State, especially in Burlington, and Sioux City, Des Moines and Webster City. For the most part his contributions were unsigned, going as the work of

the editors or of their staff. He dealt usually with some matter of local historical or scientific interest. His editorial experience trained his eye for what was timely and interesting and his articles were most acceptable and with few exceptions were widely quoted. He did not "harp" on the Historical Department. If he mentioned his work it was in such a way as to arouse interest in his collections and a desire to see their usefulness enlarged. Few men of note in the State were doing good work or passed from the stage of action but Mr. Aldrich would commemorate their work with an interview full of interesting recollections. His practice of anonymous writing was due alike to design and modesty. He knew that editors liked to get his articles for they enhanced the attractiveness of their pages and he thereby increased their personal interest in his own particular work and further he knew that too much publicity that smacks of self-exploitation is detrimental. Moreover, he had pleasure in watching the effect of his stray darts shot thus silently into the air. In his immediate dealings with men, Mr. Aldrich was an interesting complex of affability and force, reserve and timidity. He was gracious with strangers visiting the Department and genial and confiding with his friends. He was generous to a fault with his time with youth, curious about his treasures, pouring out interesting anecdotes and information that fascinated his young auditors.

He never cajoled people but he sometimes captured them by a vehement onslaught that took them off their feet. One day a stranger came into his office and asked as to the value of an Indian ax he had in possession. It attracted Mr. Aldrich who at once turned his batteries on the owner. "Why don't you donate that ax to the Historical Department? This is the proper place for such relics." The man demurred. "But you ought to leave it here, Sir," rejoined the Curator and thereupon the visitor received a lecture upon the duty of a citizen to promote the general welfare. The difficulty of safe-keeping in private houses, the indifference and negligence of heirs and assigns and the greater usefulness of valuable mementos in a museum were energetically demonstrated.

With his body tingling with nervous force and his blue gray eye ablaze he wound up with a downright "You must leave it here, Sir." The visitor's face was an interesting study. Surprise was in his countenance but no resentment and he seriously responded, "Well, perhaps it would be more sensible to do as you say." There was no arrogance nor impertinent presumption in Mr. Aldrich's manner. He was dead in earnest and he made you feel that he was acting from a sense of duty in the capacity of a public servant and not as a grasping selfish collector seeking personal aggrandizement.

One of the most conspicuous traits of Mr. Aldrich's many sided character was his intense love of old time friends, and those friends, who were legion, included birds and dumb creatures no less than men. His much quoted obituary notice of the death of his cat, his successful advocacy of a law for the protection of song birds, his delight in the songs and domestic debates and difficulties of the wrens that nested in the south front of his home at Boone bespoke a nature keenly sensitive to the beauties and finest melodies of nature. It was his greatest delight to commemorate his associates in editorial, legislative and political life. To give praise justly due, particularly to give a record to one whom oblivion seemed prone to obscure and especially to recover for a friend popular esteem of which calumny or misapprehension had deprived him was his supreme pleasure. As he would think of his articles or of those he had secured in which the good deeds and characters of Rev. John Johns and Thomas Drummond, of Governors Grimes and Carpenter were extolled, and the good names of Col. W. T. Shaw, General J. G. Lauman and General Geo. W. Jones were defended against unjust tricks of fate, his features would become luminous with pleasure.—F. I. H.

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