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JAMES PARKER HALL

BY FLOYD R. MECHEM

James Parker Hall, Dean of the University of Chicago Law School, died suddenly in Chicago, on the 13th day of March, 1928, in the fifty-seventh year of his age.

The bare details of his life are quickly told. He was born in Frewsburg, Chautauqua County, New York, November 30th, 1871. He graduated from the Jamestown High School in 1890; entered Cornell University, and was graduated in 1894. He then entered the Harvard Law School, from which he was graduated in 1897. He was admitted to the bar of the state of New York in the same year, became associated with one of the leading law firms of Buffalo, and began practice there. Incidentally, he taught part time in the Buffalo Law School. After three years at Buffalo, he was called to the Law School of Leland Stanford University. He served there two years. Upon the opening of the University of Chicago Law School in 1902, he was invited to come to Chicago. Two years later, when Professor Beale, upon the expiration of his leave of absence, returned to Harvard, Mr. Hall was made Dean of the Law School, and served in that capacity until his death. In politics, he described himself as an independent Republican, and, in his religious affiliations, as a Unitarian.

The significant matters cannot be so briefly stated. Mr. Hall was generously endowed by nature. His unusual mind was housed in a body of unusual grace and attractiveness. He had an agreeable voice; in speech he was not only fluent but felicitous. He carried himself always with dignity, and everywhere gave the impression of distinction. He had a retentive memory, and a mind of great power—keen, active, and alert. His mental processes at times suggested the operation of a well-oiled machine—they were so sure, so smooth, and so rapid. At times, in the language of a member

of one of the other faculties, "his mind seemed to work like a steel trap." He was a precocious youth. He finished his course at Cornell with honors and was elected to Phi Beta Kappa. He was in the front rank in his class at the Harvard Law School; was one of the editors of the Law Review, and took his degree cum laude.

Mr. Hall entered upon his work as Dean of the Law School with high ideals as to what a law school should be, and high standards for admission and graduation were established and rigorously maintained. During his entire service, he guarded the interests of the Law School with zealous if not jealous care and attention. The standing which the Law School has attained is in large measure attributable to his untiring efforts in its behalf.

It was, perhaps, in the classroom, that Mr. Hall was seen at his best. He loved to teach. He prepared himself with great care and thoroughness, and gave the impression of being, what he was in fact, the master of his subject. He had an almost uncanny facility in the invention of hypothetical cases with which to test the soundness of legal propositions. He was courteous and patient in his manner, and sought to inspire independent thinking on the part of the student.

At different times, and particularly in his earlier years, he taught a wide variety of subjects, but his chief interests were in Constitutional Law and Torts, which he taught practically without interruption for twenty-five years. He gave much thought to constitutional questions, and had reasoned opinions on most of them. He was not a radical, though he entertained liberal views, and could, perhaps, be best described as belonging to the school of thought of Mr. Justice Holmes. His views in his later years seemed to lean rather in the direction of greater conservatism than of greater liberalism.

He enjoyed the work in Torts and had developed a comprehensive theory of legal liability.

His work as dean and teacher, and the variety of other interests which he accumulated as time went on, did not leave him much time for extensive productive scholarship. He was the editor of a series of elementary volumes upon legal subjects, written chiefly by other law school teachers (though he contributed one volume himself), which appeared in 1910. He compiled a volume of cases upon Constitutional Law which appeared in 1913, which was a model of analysis and comprehensiveness, and became and is the standard book in that subject. He published a supplement to it in 1926, and had in mind a thorough reorganization of it as

soon as he could gain the necessary time. He was also chosen to write the life of his friend and teacher, Professor James Bradley Thayer. In addition to these works, he wrote many articles, notes and book reviews for the law journals, and made many addresses before various legal bodies.

He gave much time to various organizations for the improvement of the law. He was a director of the American Judicature Society, and chairman of the legal research committee of the Commonwealth Fund. He was active in the work of the Association of American Law Schools, and was its president in 1921-22. As such, he took a leading part in the organization of the American Law Institute, becoming a member of the council and of the executive committee, and serving continuously until his death. He also took an active part in the conferences concerning the restatement of the law of Torts. During the War he served one year with the rank of major in the Department of the Judge Advocate. He was for three years a member of the board of trustees of Cornell University; and, in addition, he was constantly a member of various boards, committees and commissions at the University of Chicago. In all of these services he gave the best that there was in him, and there is widespread testimony as to his judgment, good sense, and reasonableness. Although he had strong convictions, he was not obstinate, and yielded cheerfully when convinced that he was wrong. In his dealings with colleagues and associates he was fair and square. You knew where he stood even though he differed with you.

He had many invitations to go to other institutions in various capacities, but he chose to remain in Chicago.

Of his more personal relationships and friendships—and they were many and highly cherished—this is, perhaps, not the place to speak. This much, however, may not inappropriately be said—the greatest compensation of the teacher's life is the opportunity which it affords to make an impression upon the plastic minds and characters of the students with whom he comes in contact. This compensation Mr. Hall had in the fullest measure. Throughout the United States—on the bench, at the bar, and in law school faculties—there are hundreds of men who came under Dean Hall's influence, and who had for him great admiration and affection. As long as they live, they will cherish the memories of the fruitful and stimulating hours which they spent in his classroom. These are his real and most abiding memorial. Even in his ashes live his wonted fires.