

## IN MEMORIAM

*Matthias A. Shaaber (1897–1979)*

**M**ATTHIAS A. SHAABER died of cancer on December 10, 1979, in Philadelphia, only a few days before what would have been his eighty-second birthday. He had suffered greatly from this disease, and in different ways from eye disorders, for the last few years of his life, but he continued to appear regularly in his office at the University of Pennsylvania Library, and to work steadily upon his latest book, until about three months before the end. For those who saw the gallantry of his endurance, and the nobility of his stoic response to suffering, few words could be so appropriate as those which Hamlet spoke of Horatio:

for thou hast been  
As one in suffering all that suffers nothing,  
A man that Fortune's buffets and rewards  
Hast ta'en with equal thanks; and blessed are those  
Whose blood and judgment are so well comeddled  
That they are not a pipe for Fortune's finger  
To sound what stop she please.

Born in Reading, Pennsylvania, on December 13, 1897, he spent his entire academic career at the University of Pennsylvania, gaining all three academic degrees there, in the span between 1918 and 1928, and rising thereafter through the ranks of instructor to professor and to the John Welsh Centennial chair. In all, his association with the University of Pennsylvania covered a span of over sixty-five years, as student, teacher, and emeritus professor who continued as curator of the Horace Howard Furness Memorial Shakespeare Library until his death. He became a legendary figure at Penn, about whom many affectionate stories accumulated (all of which were creditable to him, and most of which he would have denied), and he exerted a powerful influence upon many who were associated with him. The lifetime of dedication and commitment which Matt Shaaber devoted to one institution is not much seen or indeed much sought today, as institutional mores have altered, but when one looks at the fruits which came from his steadfast commitment, one can only wish for more of the same. Even when Shaaber retired in 1968, he continued as curator of the Furness Shake-

speare Library, an unsalaried post but by no means a sinecure, in which he assured the maintenance of a collection which is unrivalled among universities of the world, and excelled only by such specialized institutions as the Folger and the Huntington.

Professor Shaaber's first book was *Some Forerunners of the Newspaper in England, 1476–1622*, followed by a study of Shakespeare's early editors and the splendid New Variorum edition of Shakespeare's *2 Henry IV*, itself the fruit of ten years' labor. In addition, there were innumerable other publications, and his many services to the profession at large, of which only a few can be mentioned here. For a number of years, he was one of the principal compilers of the annual English Literature Bibliography for the Modern Language Association of America, and from 1955 to 1967 he was editor of the annual journal *Studies in the Renaissance*, published by the Renaissance Society of America. Having been active in the founding of that organization, he was elected its president in 1969, and both before and after his presidency he was close to the guidance of its affairs. And his scholarship continued without intermission after his retirement. Even in the last year of his life, he was usually the first to hurry away from the Faculty Club after lunch to get back to his work in the library, and he worked summer and winter, all day long, unremittingly, on his monumental bibliographies, contributing during his emeritus years more in a substantive scholarly way than most academics achieve in a whole lifetime. Some of his principal publications in this period were *Sixteenth Century Imprints in the Libraries of the University of Pennsylvania*, of 1976, and *English Seventeenth Century Imprints in the Libraries of the University of Pennsylvania*, of 1978, and at the time of his death he had virtually completed a book cataloguing all works prior to 1824 in the Henry Charles Lea Library of Medieval History here. These meticulously accurate bibliographies make accessible to scholars everywhere convenient and reliable information on distinguished sixteenth and seventeenth century collections at his own University, but perhaps the most important of his later contributions was the completion of his *Check-List of Works of British Authors Printed Abroad, in Languages Other Than English, to 1641*, published by the Bibliographical Society of America in 1975, which is particularly important because of its presentation of information never before brought together in readily usable form about the printing outside of Britain and in languages other than English of British authors up to 1641. This work was all the more

notable because it was completed without benefit of research assistants, editorial committees, or computers. In this *Check-List*, Shaaber provides full descriptions of more than six thousand books, with their imprints, and includes their library locations where known, along with standard reference citations. In a review considering both the revised *Short-Title Catalogue* volume issued in 1976, and Shaaber's *Check-List*, Franklin B. Williams, Jr., recognized the high merit of both these massive contributions, but accorded Shaaber the more particular praise, because of his single-handed, pioneering effort in a subject of great importance to Renaissance specialists. As Williams put it, "Shaaber has marked the trail through a wilderness (it has taken fifty years for hundreds of workers to blacktop the road laid out in the 1926 *STC*!)" [*Moreana* vol. 13 (1977), pp. 115–18, the quotation being the final sentence of the review].

He was not a man given to emotional self-indulgence, nor impressed by the clever manipulation of literary critical jargon, and when he addressed himself directly to poetry and drama it was to bring some new historical light to bear upon it, as he so often did. With many accomplishments of which to be proud, he remained one of the most modest of men. He was also one of the kindest, always ready to lay out his own vast learning for the benefit of students and senior scholars alike. At a memorial service several years ago, he spoke feelingly of another departed colleague, whom he described as "kind to students and dumb animals." Although I never saw much of Matt's association with dumb animals, his generosity with students and colleagues was unfailing. Whether directly or indirectly, all of us who are professional scholars have learned much, and will continue to learn much, from Matt Shaaber's distinguished contributions to scholarship. It seems only natural to apply to him the words which Shakespeare wrote as a final tribute to Brutus:

His life was gentle, and the elements  
So mixed in him that nature might stand up  
And say to all the world "This was a man!"

Roland Mushat Frye