

**HENRY DEXTER,
SCULPTOR:
A MEMORIAL**

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Henry Dexter, Sculptor: A Memorial by John Albee

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JOHN ALBEE

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BY

JOHN ALBEE

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INTRODUCTION



TH**ERE** are ample materials in my hands for illustrating the career of Henry Dexter from his childhood to his death; and as I propose to let him be his own biographer wherever possible, I will once for all enumerate the sources from which this memorial is composed. For the first thirty years of his life there is a full autobiography of two hundred and five closely written quarto pages; and for the remainder of his life there is a variety of miscellaneous information contained in his own letters and diaries, in the public notices of the painter and sculptor (for he was both), and in the recollections of his family and friends. As I was myself one of the latter, and at the ever-memorable period of impressionable youth when art and artists and poetry were all the world that had any interest for me, I shall have a twofold pleasure in writing of a man whom I admired and loved, and at the same time recovering the free and aspiring period of my intimacy with him.

But I have not completed the inventory of resources for this memorial, those which made the closest bond between us, but which unfortunately are for the most part in such an unfinished state that I shall be unable to use them directly. These are many hundred pages of metaphysical

speculations, observations on modern science and its meaning, and a considerable volume of poetry, most of which has never been printed. These precious pages contain the record of his hidden life, of his deepest mind; and though I shall not be able to introduce them bodily into this narrative, I trust their light will incidentally shine through it, revealing, as mere outward events cannot, the real and most inward spirit of the man. Artists are seldom only artists; they are also philosophers, inventors, writers, and nearly always poets. These are their holiday guises between orders, or when the arm and the eye are weary. Mr. Dexter wrote almost as much as he wrought with chisel. But curiously enough in one who had been an extraordinarily skilful artisan from his earliest years, and before he was an artist, he lacked the constructive literary faculty. Form, which he commanded out of a block of marble, he could not so well command on paper and with pen.

We had not been long acquainted when I discovered that his portfolio was full of verses. He was so much my senior that it was with great trepidation that I ventured to confide to him my own attempts in the same kind. Thereafter—what shall I say?—we inscribed poems to each other, and some of them were printed in the local Cambridge newspaper. What they meant was probably an enigma to readers, if there were any; but that mattered not at all to us. *We* read them, and carried under our cloaks the delightful and sacred mystery. Thus his inner nature and aspiration became known to me; and though, as I have said, he was much my senior and had long before made his place in the world, he was really much younger