

## WILMARTH SHELDON LEWIS

1895-1979

**W**ILMARTH SHELDON LEWIS, the founder and editor-in-chief of this edition, died on October 7, 1979, shortly before his 84th birthday, which he would have celebrated on November 14. Birthdays were significant events to him, and so were celebrations. He had at first hoped to complete the edition by his fifty-fifth birthday, but World War II, together with newly discovered letters and increasing complexities of annotation, kept postponing the final day of triumph.

Yet he saw his edition complete though not all in print. He read most of the annotation (and two-thirds of the galley proof) of the present three volumes; he wrote the introduction to them; he was even able to glance at the typescript of the final index though failing eyesight kept him from reading it. The concluding celebration alone escaped him—and what a jubilee it would have been!

He started to collect Walpole's letters in 1924, and he began this edition of the correspondence in 1933. In his *Collector's Progress* and *One Man's Education* he tells how he, at that time a collector rather than a scholar, persuaded Yale University to entrust this monumental editorial enterprise to him. The edition has ever since been guided by his good taste, and publicized by his extraordinary genius for promotion.

The edition profited by his ingenuity too. Previous editors had always numbered their letters for purposes of cross-reference, and then had encountered difficulties when letters had to be switched, or when new ones were inserted. He decided to cross-refer to letters merely by their dates, printing the dates in the running-heads of the pages, so that the reader could find them more readily. He insisted on a preliminary index before the editing was begun. He devised various space-saving devices to shorten the annotation, introducing new abbreviations and cue-titles.