



*Portrait of W. B.
Munro by
Seymour
Thomas hangs
in the lounge
of the Dabney
Hall of the
Humanities.*

William Bennett Munro

A Memoir by Harvey Eagleson

Best known as a writer and authority on the United States Government and Constitution, William Bennett Munro (1875-1957) was born in Canada. He received his BA and MA degrees from Queens University in Kingston, Ontario. After studying law for two years at the University of Edinburgh, he decided against a legal career and turned instead to teaching the social sciences. He got a second MA and a PhD from Harvard, taught for a few years at Williams College, then returned to Harvard as instructor in government. He came to Caltech after a long (1904-1929) and distinguished career at Harvard in teaching, writing, University administration, and Cambridge and Boston civic affairs. In this excerpt from a book, William Bennett Munro: A Memoir, to be published by the Institute in February, Harvey Eagle-son, professor of English, writes of Munro's years in California, and of his lasting influence on some prominent California educational institutions — most particularly, the California Institute of Technology.

In the mid-twenties Munro began to spend but half the year at Harvard and the other half year writing in Pasadena, where his wife's parents frequently wintered, and where he also bought a home at 268 Bellefontaine Street. At this time he became acquainted with James A. Blaisdell, president of Pomona College. In the early twenties it had become evident to President Blaisdell that a decision affecting the whole character of Pomona College must be made. The post-World War I growth of population in southern California, and the pressure on the few local colleges for expansion to accommodate the ever growing numbers of young people seeking education, brought up the problem of whether Pomona College was to remain as it was, a small liberal arts college, or lose its identity and character in becoming a private university. The last alternative did not appeal to President Blaisdell. Instead he conceived the plan, unique in American collegiate institutions, of a group of small colleges, each having its own character and identity. He had many talks with several people on this subject, among them Munro, who was much interested in the idea. As a consequence Munro was asked to give the address at the thirty-second Commencement of Pomona College, June 15, 1925. It was entitled "The College at the Crossroads" and proved to be, perhaps, the most important speech of his life.

He said, in part: "In the life of every man there are times when he stands at the crossroads. He comes to the parting of the ways and is in doubt which way to turn. We have all had that experience. But we do not always bear in mind that the same is true of institutions. They also, from time to time, must make some fateful decisions and must choose between perplexing alternatives. Every college sooner or later reaches a point where the paths diverge. One of them leads to expansion, to the surrender of old collegiate ideals, to the transferring of the college into a uni-

versity. The other alternative, which several American colleges have chosen during the past few years, involves a limitation of numbers, a refusal to grow beyond a certain point, and a consequent restriction of the service which can be rendered to the community.

"... Shall the college remain a college, with all the intimacy of instruction and fellowship which a simple collegiate status implies, or shall it prepare to go the way that so many of our colleges have gone? — for remember that Yale, Harvard, Princeton, Columbia, all began as small institutions. Or again, is there some third alternative? Is the crossroads a three-way point at which the wayfarer has a choice between more routes than two?"

"All other American colleges, on arriving at this point in the past, have chosen to stereotype themselves, to stay small in both numbers and resources, thus narrowing their service to the constituency and losing many valuable friends, or, on the other hand, they have thrown open the gates and, like Dartmouth, for example, have become universities in fact though not in name. In neither case do they seem to be happy about it.

"Here, then, is the opportunity for Pomona to do a great service not only to her own future but to the future of higher education in general. No college is better situated to launch out upon the third alternative, to try the plan of creating two or more academic units joined in a common enterprise. You have here an ideal location, with plenty of land for expansion. You are within easy range of an area which in a very few years will contain more than two million people. You have already a nucleus, a reputation, and what is most important of all, sound traditions already created. It is your task to determine, now that you have arrived at the parting of the ways, whether you will do just as all other colleges have done and are doing, or whether you will do something new, different, and manifestly superior."

A community of colleges

This speech sparked the fuel of President Blaisdell's ideas. In 1925 Claremont College was founded, followed by Scripps College in 1926, and two decades later Claremont Men's College in 1947 and Harvey Mudd College in 1955. Munro took an active part in bringing these ideas to fruition. He became a member of the original Board of Fellows of Claremont College, December 9, 1925, and served on the Board until June 24, 1949. He became a member of the original Board of Trustees of Scripps College in June, 1926, and served until June, 1949, when he became an Honorary Member until the time of his death.

In 1932 Munro became interested in helping to initiate another now successful educational institution in California, the Midland School, a private preparatory school for boys. The Midland School is

located at Los Olivos in the country near Santa Barbara. Its educational ideals are those which appealed to Munro — emphasis on teaching and study, little stress on luxurious buildings and quarters. The boys at Midland lead a Spartan life, living in cabins and using equipment largely constructed by themselves, but their record in college and life has been a striking testimony to the excellence of their preparation.

Mr. Paul Squibb, the founder of the school and Headmaster until his retirement in 1952, writes:

"The crisp, definite, vivid lectures of Professor Munro in our Government One course at Harvard made an indelible impression on me and many others.

"In February, 1932, I asked Professor Munro, then at Caltech, to serve as an advisory director of a boarding school for boys that would stress arduous study and frugal living. He assured me there was need for such a school in California and confirmed my notion that depression times were as good as any for such a venture. He said he would be glad to serve on our advisory board and wished me all success in launching the Midland School on a sea that, to most businessmen, looked very stormy indeed.

"As our plans developed, I would stop occasionally at the Institute and report progress and get his reactions. His ideas were always definite, and usually related to the thought that hard work was the only cure for depression in a nation. I suppose he would have said the same for an individual as for a nation.

"Occasionally, in conversation or correspondence over the period from 1932 until his last years, I would raise questions of detail. As I recall, he always avoided answering such questions by turning the thought back to main purposes and objectives. His importance as a member of our advisory board consisted mostly of single-minded emphasis upon two ideals that he admired.

"His name is inscribed on a bronze plaque in our school chapel, and it appears frequently in archives and records, as a very positive influence in the founding and the conduct of Midland School."

The California Institute

In 1925, Dr. George Ellery Hale and Dr. Robert A. Millikan persuaded Munro to give some lectures during the time he was away from Harvard and in Pasadena at the then small and newly named (1920) California Institute of Technology. This Institute had developed from a school of arts and crafts founded in 1891 by the Honorable Amos G. Throop and called Throop Polytechnic. Upon its Board of Trustees was George Ellery Hale, the first Director of the Mount Wilson Observatory. He saw the possibilities of developing in Pasadena a distinguished institution of science and engineering. It was largely through his efforts, backed by certain wealthy and farsighted Pasadenans, and later aided by Dr. Arthur Noyes and Dr. Robert Millikan, that the present Institute came into being.

One of the basic principles in the Institute's educational policy was from the first the inclusion of a large amount of humanistic studies as a supplement to the scientific and engineering subjects. In a report submitted to and accepted by the Trustees of the Institute at their meeting in November, 1926, the statement is made: "The Institute desires, and so soon as funds become available intends, to develop the cultural opportunities of its undergraduate and fifth year students in such a way as to afford them, so far as possible within a five year period, a background of appreciation of all sides of human activity — history, literature, art, economics, the nature sciences — such as a broadly educated scientist or engineer should possess."

Also included in the report is the suggestion by Munro that in order to obtain these ends, "the humanities must have on the campus a home of its own. There must be erected and equipped a Hall of the Liberal Arts (or Hall of the Humanities) devoted exclusively to such studies."

At the same meeting it was "moved by Mr. Robinson, seconded by Mr. Hiram Wadsworth, that Dr. Millikan be authorized on behalf of the Board to negotiate with Dr. Munro with a view to his becoming a regular member of the faculty of the Institute, giving the Institute one-half of his time . . . and to state that if Dr. Munro felt disposed to accept that proposal the Trustees would endeavor through some method not yet determined, to create an endowment for this work of at least \$250,000."

A new phase of activity

In the autumn of 1928, the Dabney Hall of Humanities, the gift of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph B. Dabney, was opened with an endowment of \$400,000 contributed by other friends of the Institute. The building incorporated in its structure and design many of the ideas of Munro. At that same time Munro left Harvard and came permanently and full time to the Institute as professor of history and member of the Executive Council, the governing body of the Institute with Dr. Millikan as chairman. The Institute had no president during this time, though for all practical purposes Dr. Millikan was the president until his retirement in 1945. With this change Munro entered upon a new phase of activity, less productive in research than the Harvard period, immensely productive in administrative, educational, civic and philanthropic work.

Immediately upon his arrival full time at the California Institute he began to take a vital part in the affairs of the Institute. In 1929 he became the chairman of the highly important Trustee Committee on Buildings and Grounds, remaining in that position until 1953. The enormous amount of time, energy and attention he gave to the complicated detail of academic building and landscaping is testified to by his

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extended reports to the Trustees and incorporated in their minutes.

His first task as chairman of the committee was the building of four Student Houses which were to change, in large part, the life and character of the Caltech undergraduate. In a report of a special committee (consisting of W. B. Munro, R. A. Millikan, and Arthur A. Noyes) on the Development of Student Life at the Institute, it was stated: "It is the committee's unanimous opinion that the *educational* values and implications to be derived from a system of small-group residence and dining hall would fully justify the extra cost involved." The response of the Trustees to this report was to designate Munro "to represent the Executive Council in the preparation of the plans and in discussions with the architects and builder concerning the proposed dormitories and the Athenaeum."

Harkness Fund

In 1936-37 (the exact date is uncertain) Munro made a suggestion to Dr. Millikan which was to result, monetarily, in the greatest benefit to the humanities at Caltech. Munro had become a friend of Edward S. Harkness during the building of the Student Houses at Harvard which were the gift of Mr. Harkness. Munro told Dr. Millikan that Mr. Harkness had no interest in contributing funds for science, but he might contribute modestly (Munro hoped at the best for \$50,000) to the humanities at Caltech. Mr. Harkness was duly approached and replied that he would make his own investigation of the matter. On March 1, 1937, the Institute was informed that Mr. Harkness had set aside \$750,000 as endowment for the humanities at the California Institute, the income to be used in addition to that provided already for the humanities, the gift to be given as little publicity as possible and to remain strictly anonymous, which it did until it was designated on the Institute's books as the Edward S. Harkness Fund on July 3, 1948.

In 1940, after the death of Mr. Harkness, Dr. Millikan asked permission of Mrs. Harkness to honor her husband by creating in the Humanities Division the Edward S. Harkness Professor of History and Government with Munro as the first incumbent. The permission was granted, and Munro was made Harkness Professor on December 12, 1940.

On August 13, 1945, Munro retired from active teaching and the Executive Council (it was to go out of existence with the arrival of Lee DuBridge as president of the Institute), and became Professor Emeritus, a member of the Board of Trustees, and Treasurer of the Institute. A year later his portrait by Seymour Thomas was hung in Dabney Hall of the Humanities. On that occasion Mr. James R. Page, then president of the Board of Trustees of the Insti-

tute, said: "As the scientists, research men and teachers of the California Institute of Technology approach retiring age it has been the practice of the administration to persuade them to have their portraits painted to be hung in the various buildings in which much of their distinguished research has taken place. In accordance with this custom, as Dr. Munro was reaching this stage in his academic career, the administration tried to get his permission to have his portrait painted. Dr. Munro put up a strong resistance to this and convinced everyone concerned that, although he was ripening, he was far from reaching his maturity. He seemed to think that the change of tense from the Present Indicative to the Past Indicative was more than a change of mood. When he was finally worn down to a point where he made up his mind to retire from a forty-hour week as Professor of History and Government and a member of the Executive Council to become the full time Treasurer of the Institute and a Trustee, which entails one hundred and eighty hours a week, he then consented to have his portrait painted . . ."

On the same occasion Dr. Millikan said: ". . . as a teacher, scholar, writer, financier, businessman, promoter, wise counselor, able administrator, and great humanitarian, William B. Munro rates as one of the most important builders of the California Institute of Technology, and it is hoped that this Seymour Thomas portrait of him will help to keep his spirit and influence alive on this campus throughout the decades and the centuries that lie ahead . . ."

Some tributes

This life of great activity and immense usefulness ended September 4, 1957, when Munro died quietly in his Pasadena home on Bellefontaine Street where he had lived so many years. Some days later a Memorial service conducted by Bishop Francis E. Bloy was held in the garden near his study in which he had done so much of his life work.

Nathan M. Pusey, the President of Harvard, wrote: "All of those who came in contact with Mr. Munro will long remember his thoughtful solicitude for his students and the perceptive mind which he brought to his speciality. Harvard is grateful for having had the benefit of so many of his productive years."

Lee A. DuBridge, President of the California Institute of Technology wrote: "He came to Caltech during its formative period and had a decisive influence on guiding its destinies along the path which has brought it to its present stature as one of the leading scientific institutions of the world. For all of his contributions to the Institute and for all his personal kindness and inspiration to his many friends he will be long remembered."