

John Robertson Macarthur

A Tribute by Horace Gilbert



To the many Caltech alumni of the period 1920-1945, news of the death of Dr. Macarthur will recall some of the most appreciated personal associations of their college days. He died in Chula Vista, California, on January 31, 1960, in his eighty-sixth year. As dean of freshmen from 1923 to 1937, and again during the war period, Dr. Macarthur met all first year students, and for many of them he continued to be a valued counselor throughout their years at Caltech.

John Macarthur was born in Winnipeg, Canada, and was educated at the University of Manitoba and the University of Chicago. Before coming to Caltech in 1920 he had taught English at the New Mexico Agricultural College and at Kansas State Agricultural College. He was a member of Phi Beta Kappa and of Pi Kappa Delta (honorary forensics fraternity). He served as national president of the latter organization from 1922-26, during which time he established a local chapter at Caltech. He served also as editor of *The Forensic*, the fraternity's national magazine, for several years. He was the author of three books: *The First Part of Sir John Oldcastle*, *Biblical Literature and Its Background*, and *Ancient Greece in Modern America*.

Most students will remember Dr. Macarthur as the organizer of the Sunday morning breakfasts for freshmen at the home of Caltech's benefactor, Mr. Arthur Fleming, and the suppers at the home of Dr. and Mrs. Millikan. He also escorted groups of students

to the Huntington Library, where he instructed them in its art and literary treasures. He was a great admirer of Dr. Arthur A. Noyes, and assisted him in carrying out Caltech's educational objective of developing outstanding students. He was in charge of the Junior Travel Prize program.

In addition to his administrative responsibilities as dean of freshmen, he was professor of languages, and taught the classes qualifying graduate students for their doctoral degrees. He coached Caltech debating teams and promoted forensic competition. He was active in dramatics and a prime supporter of the annual Greek Play. Off-campus, for several years he served as organist at St. James Episcopal Church in South Pasadena. He had traveled abroad extensively.

During World War II, Dr. Macarthur resumed his deanship to meet an emergency caused by Dean Untereiner's leave of absence, but he resigned on V-E Day. After his retirement in 1945, Dr. Macarthur became an ordained minister of the Episcopal Church, and for several years served as vicar of St. Andrews-by-the-Lake, in Elsinore, California.

The Division of Humanities can well be proud of Dr. Macarthur, who exemplified so many of the virtues it professes. Beyond the usual rewards of academic work well done, he gave of himself in such a way that he was able to win the confidence of aspiring, sometimes troubled, students, and to help them rise to the fullness of their capabilities.