

MEMORIAL RESOLUTION

JOHN MILL McCLELLAND (1889 – 1961)

John Mill McClelland came of Victorian English stock of liberal sympathies; his immediate forebears came to America as members of the group surrounding the sociological experimenter Robert Owen, and settled in Ohio. Dr. McClelland's undergraduate education was completed at Oberlin College, and from here he went immediately into the service for World War I. Invalided out with pneumonia, resulting in asthma which handicapped his activities for the rest of his life, he settled with his mother in California, where he entered Stanford University as a major in French. He received his M.A. in French in 1925 and his Ph.D. in English in 1933. Becoming a teaching assistant before he completed his Master's degree, he rose through the ranks to a professorship in 1954. He died at the Veterans Administration Hospital in San Francisco on August 14, 1961.

He was greatly valued for his critical acumen, his wide knowledge of English life and literature, and his encyclopedic command of modern English prose. So thoroughly versed in Eighteenth-Century poetry that he unaffectedly wrote imitations of Pope's lesser works while yet in high school, Dr. McClelland retained these early impressions of graceful precision and wit, and was notable for his own expression in writing and conversation, which was marked by Augustan sparkle and acerbic austerity of phrasing. His greatest service to the University and its students was his understanding of style and his ability to make the undergraduate mind aware of delicate distinctions among the felicities of modern authors.

His memory was phenomenal, though the riches of verse and prose which illuminated his own mind were not pretentiously thrown off in constant quotation. To prove some point in argument, however, he was likely to offer twenty or more lines from an admitted favorite,-- Donne, Marvell, Thomson, Dyer, and romantic poets of whom Byron seemed to be chief in his mind. It was characteristic of Dr. McClelland's independent spirit and intellectual integrity that he deprecated any singular powers in retaining such extensive and numerous passages and poems; his simple expedient for storing up these pleasures was to fasten a selection on the handle-bars of his bicycle and memorize as he wheeled to and from classes.

This suggests indifference to general social habits or the genial amusement of passersby; but Dr. McClelland was fortunate in living most of his life in the period when strong individuality, even idiosyncrasy, was accepted as amiable and valuable in the academic mind, as an off-shoot of distinguished predilections and vivid inner experience, and as an indication of a ripely cultivated life and habit. His students and colleagues had a strong affection for these distinctive elements of personality and character, valuing them as warmly as they appreciated his refinements of critical judgment and his generous expenditure of himself and his time in personal or objective discussions on life and art.

Dr. McClelland was a man of many friendships, and many of them were among young people whom he met after his retirement from active life in the University. Visitors to his home

in San Francisco would find him surrounded by his favorite prints and paintings, with books on every supporting surface, and those with which he was immediately concerned in piles on the floor about his arm-chair. Many of his student friends recall to each other some specific impression which summed up the McClelland charm and distinction: the fervor which marked his introduction of the visitor to the latest of his Canaletto prints; his obedience to the caprices of his prized cats; his surprising acceptance of new talents among authors very different from those of his own early tastes and experiences.

He was quite frankly a bookish person, somewhat deliberately retired from academic tempests and contemporary social life. When someone complained of a disillusionment or falsity, or of some pettiness, he would say merely, "You should not be surprised at all--that is life as it is lived; you and I, unfortunately, expect people to act as they do in novels."

Margery Bailey, Chairman
George F. Sensabaugh
Virgil K. Whitaker