

## DUNCAN MACMURRAY MACCALLUM :

### THE MAN AND HIS WORK

THE death of Duncan MacCallum on 23 January 1971 came as a shock. His friends—and there were so many of them—had known that he lived with pain for a very long time and had seen him struggle against discomfort and even disability. But Duncan had borne his troubles with a serenity which was, indeed, an integral part of his nature. He had grown weaker in the last few months but it was scarcely suspected by his circle of acquaintance that the end was so near.

Duncan's death produced a sense of shock in another way. He had a wonderful talent for identifying himself with institutions and societies and places. For years, he had been a part of the little community at Mount Wilson and, even when he had given up his house there, he remained a member of the Trust which guided its affairs. He was rarely in residence for long periods but his devotion to the village had made him seem to be one of the most enduring of its inhabitants. It was the same with the groups in which his interest was maintained. There were many such. Chief among them was the Sydney University Arts Association. Duncan had been a prime mover in its foundation and he held most of its offices at various times. But his greatest contribution to the Association was his wholehearted loyalty and concern. In a quite unexplainable fashion, Duncan had the facility for merging himself in its work so that he became a part of it. When people thought of the Arts Association, they thought of Duncan MacCallum—though they knew well enough that he was no all-purpose manager and that others played an equally large part in its affairs. It was this which caused the shock at his death. It was not merely that a friend had died ; it was as if something had gone out of a fellowship.

Duncan MacCallum's greatest loyalty was to his University. He was proud of his family's long association with the University of Sydney and of the work that his grandfather, Sir Mungo, had done for it. He was proud to have entered it from Sydney Grammar, itself an offshoot of the University and for over a century a large source of able students. He was proud of his connection with the University for over thirty years, as student and teacher. He loved its setting and its ceremonial. He always did his best to have a room as close as possible to the Main Quadrangle. He attended Faculty meetings and graduation ceremonies with assiduity and, when ill-health prevented his coming, an apology would unfailingly arrive. Above all else, Duncan was proud of his University because of the values that he believed it to hold—scholarly integrity, the resolute pursuit of the truth, the frank and courteous association of like-minded colleagues and the mission to train up its students in these

virtues. Duncan's devotion to Sydney was lifelong and entire. It was not that he thought it better than other universities; rather, other universities did not enter upon his frame of reference. With his passing, the University of Sydney lost its best friend.

He was always referred to as "Duncan". But it was not a mode of address that he encouraged. He was a stickler for the courtesy that is often called "old world". Letters to him had to bear the title "Esquire" and he would be put out by undue familiarity of manner. His chuckle was infectious, even if the occasion for it was not always immediately comprehensible, but he was not one to court an easy popularity. He once described his mode of teaching as "austere". To the generations of students who remembered the unreadable handwriting, the lecture notes jotted on scraps of paper and miraculously retrieved from a chaotic pile in time to be referred to, the lack of economy in exposition, the difficulty in getting the First Fleet safely to Botany Bay before the end of First Term—to these, "austere" would scarcely have seemed an exact description. Yet it was a true one. For all his apparent fussiness and lack of order, Duncan was a severe scholar and teacher. He was rigorous in his examination of historical ideas and evidence and forthright in his examination of those to whom he imparted his methods. If his lecture-room exposition was leisurely, it was because he considered that the early history of Australia deserved patient scrutiny. If he studied the records with great care, it was the outcome of his belief that his students needed, and had the right to require, to see an historian at work. There were no glib generalizations, no artfully planted anecdotes, in Duncan's lectures and seminar discussions. In return, he neither expected, nor valued, showiness in his students. To Duncan, scrupulous precision was an essential part of scholarship. And History deserved only the best of scholarly attention. A doctoral thesis and the script of a radio documentary would alike receive elaborate dissection. He could not understand when students chafed and colleagues grew impatient when confronted by such methods. In the long run, his lack of comprehension was praiseworthy. It saddened him that others could not agree with his procedures but it could not occur to him to alter them. Very often, those who were critical—and in the face of such integrity and such personal kindness it was hard to maintain a critical attitude—were themselves guilty of shallow thinking or hasty judgement. Duncan's processes of thought were circuitous and elaborate but, at the same time, exacting. His manner of life was not dissimilar.

It is fitting that this account of Duncan should appear in *Arts*. He gave much time and enthusiasm to the journal from its inception. He brought to it those qualities of meticulous scholarship, a high discrimination of material and a sensitivity to what fellow-scholars were trying to say which were hall-marks of his character. In editing *Arts* he was able to do something in a tangible fashion not only for learning in general but also for the promotion of learning in the University that he loved so well.

K. J. CABLE.