

# Robert Eugene Cushman

*March 27, 1889 — June 9, 1969*

Robert Eugene Cushman, Goldwin Smith Professor of Government, Emeritus, and for many years head of the Department of Government, died in Washington, D. C., on June 9, 1969. He was born in Akron, Ohio, on March 27, 1889, and was the son of Sylvanus Dustin Cushman and his wife Estelle Caroline. Professor Cushman married Clarissa White Fairchild in 1916. They had two sons, Robert and John.

Professor Cushman had his formal education at Oberlin College and Columbia University. Columbia gave him the Ph.D. degree in 1917; Oberlin gave him an honorary Litt.D. degree in 1946. Study and writing and teaching, together with some involvement in academic administration, filled up his professional life from the time he began as an instructor in history and civics at Oberlin Academy in 1911 until he retired in 1957, after thirty-four years of service at Cornell. In 1958 he moved to Washington where he took over the position of editor-in-chief of the *Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution*. The location of his command post in the National Archives Building was proof that he was in full-time service.

While at Cornell, Professor Cushman took part in the work of the University faculty. The faculty elected him to serve as its representative on the University Board of Trustees for a period of five years. He was also a trustee of Wells College. His professional eminence caused him to be chosen a member of President Roosevelt's Committee on Administrative Management and to become a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Science. In 1944 he served as president of the American Political Science Association.

*The Political Science Quarterly* published his first article in 1913. Year by year, from that time till his death, he contributed to the study of American government by books and articles and reviews. The range was wide. His *Leading Constitutional Decisions*, first published in 1925 and issued in a dozen or so later editions, shows the great central area of his work as an undergraduate teacher. In his study of *Independent Regulatory Commissions* he compared the administrative procedures of the United States with those of Great Britain and other European countries. He wrote about the case of the Nazi saboteurs. But his chief concern as a scholar and writer from 1940 was the problem of civil liberties. He himself wrote much on the subject—his presidential address to the Political Science Association in 1944 was on the topic “Civil Liberties after the War”—and, in addition, he launched the Cornell Studies in Civil Liberty with a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation. When some of Professor Cushman's

students and colleagues published a volume of essays in 1958 to show their affection and respect, they gave it the title *Aspects of Liberty*.

To many thousands of Cornell undergraduates Professor Cushman was the teacher of the elementary course in American government, and in him they saw the Cornell concept of undergraduate teaching at its best. The teacher was a scholar of eminence and a man of practical experience in the working of national government. He presented his subject simply, directly, vigorously; he answered questions, offered interpretations, and dealt with one and all, freshman or graduate student, in class and out, as though they shared with him in the business of learning. As a teacher-scholar he was one of a marvellous foursome of contemporaries who had offices side by side in Boardman Hall: Carl L. Becker, M. L. W. Laistner, Robert E. Cushman, and Carl Stephenson.

To his colleagues and other friends Professor Cushman was an open, warm companion; they went to him for practical advice, or to state a case about University policy, or to talk over the affairs of the day. He listened well, he spoke with simple force; his voice, with a hint of dryness in it, kept to the facts, to the logic, to the way of reason.

He was in many respects the perfect representative of the Cornell professor of the 1930s, 40s, and 50s. He was both teacher and scholar, he participated in the management of University affairs, he presided over the growth of a department which gave strength to the College of Arts and Sciences and to the University, He brought his students face to face with the governmental problems with which they were to contend, above all with the problem of civil liberty.

*Herbert W. Briggs, John W. MacDonald, Frederick George Marcham*