

George Harris Healey

May 10, 1908 — November 16, 1971

The death of George Harris Healey, professor of English and curator of Rare Books, was a severe loss to Cornell. His deep loyalty to the University over a period of thirty-one years, and the value of his many and varied contributions to its work earned him an enduring place in the roll of dedicated Cornellians.

He was born in Wellsville, New York, the son of Edmund James and Annabelle Harris Healey. After graduating from high school, he worked for a year before going to college. At West Virginia University he was awarded his A.B. degree with a major in philosophy in 1932, and his M.A. degree in English in 1935. As an undergraduate he was a member of Phi Delta Theta fraternity and was elected president of the student body. In 1934-35 he was an instructor in English at West Virginia and from 1938 to 1940 an assistant professor at Judson College in Alabama. In 1938 he married Rita Mae Slaughter of Buckharmon, West Virginia. She and their three children, Anne, George, Jr., and Linda, survive him.

He came to Cornell as a candidate for the Ph.D. in English in 1940, and served as a part-time instructor for two years, before enlisting in the Army Air Force in 1942. As an intelligence officer, he rose to the rank of captain, and in 1946, the year of his retirement from the service, he was awarded the Legion of Merit.

He returned to Cornell as the Martin Sampson Fellow in English and was awarded his doctorate in June, 1947. For the rest of his life he was a member of the Department of English: assistant professor, 1947-53; associate professor, 1953-57; professor of English and curator of Rare Books, a joint appointment with the University Library, 1957-71. He was a member of the Bibliographical Society (London), of the Bibliographical Society of America, and of the Grolier Club.

No summary of his career, however, can adequately describe the extent to which George Healey contributed to the life of Cornell — as a master teacher, a distinguished scholar, a successful administrator, and a magnanimous colleague. His survey course in British Literature, deservedly popular with undergraduates from every college in the University, was the most heavily enrolled course in English. His work as scholar and editor was always definitive. His books included: *Wordsworth's Pocket Notebook* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1943); *The Meditations of Daniel Defoe* (Cummington: Cummington Press, 1946); *The Letters of Daniel Defoe* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955); *The Cornell Wordsworth Collection: A Catalogue* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1957); *The Dublin Diary of Stanislaus Joyce* (London: Faber and Faber, 1962); the last was republished with added material

in 1971 by Cornell University Press. During his fourteen years as the University's first curator of Rare Books, the Library greatly improved its famous Dante, Petrarch, and Wordsworth Collections — thanks to his scholarship, imagination, and love for learning, for books, and for Cornell. Even more remarkable, perhaps, was his success in enlisting the support of generous donors who made possible the purchase of the books and papers which now constitute Cornell's twentieth-century collections: the superb Joyce Collection, the Wyndham Lewis Collection, the Ford Madox Ford Collection, the Shaw Collection. Under George Healey's curatorship Cornell's collection of rare books and manuscripts became one to be reckoned with by literary scholars everywhere.

Apart from performing his professional duties so admirably, he was always generous of his time in serving the University community. For many years he was secretary of the local chapter of Phi Beta Kappa, and also of the Library Associates, which grew and flourished with his assistance. He helped to found and was the first editor of the *Cornell Library Journal*. For years he served on the University's Commencement Committee, and for many years he proudly bore the mace at the head of academic processions. In 1964-65 he was chairman of the committee which planned Cornell's highly successful Centennial celebration. A superlative speaker and lecturer, he was in constant demand for appearances before alumni gatherings both on and off campus.

The generous response to a posthumous appeal for funds for a Memorial Book Fund amply testified to the respect, admiration, and affection that alumni, colleagues, and students felt for George Healey. The success of that appeal was due in good part to the recognition of him not only as a distinguished scholar, teacher, colleague, and Cornellian, but also as a man, a warm and generous person who made many friends. He was not only a humanist, a bookman, and a gifted musician, but a human being with a contagious zest for the good things in life. Most of all he enjoyed people. As one colleague wrote: "His booming welcomes to those who entered his office or called him on the telephone were joyous occasions. His quiet excitement when he examined a newly arrived book or manuscript was equally intense." His voice was unforgettable; it was distinctively his own, evident in his writing as in his speech. After his death, another wrote: "No more those wonderful, affectionate, witty, ironic, compassionate letters, no more that warm voice full of levity and learning. We shall not hear its like again."

Scott Elledge, Arthur Mizener, Francis E. Mineka