

James Frederick Mason

June 25, 1879 — January 9, 1972

James Frederick Mason was born in Portland, Maine, and always proclaimed his loyalty and affection for his state. He took his A.B. at Harvard in 1902, and after studying in France and Germany entered the graduate school of the Johns Hopkins University where he received the Ph.D. in 1911, with a dissertation on the *Melodrama in France from 1791 to 1830*. He came to Cornell in 1909 as an assistant in French, and was promoted to assistant professor in 1912 and to professor in 1914. He retired as professor of Romance languages, emeritus, in June, 1945, and took up residence in New Jersey and later in Florida. He died at his home in Ormond Beach, Florida, in 1972, at the age of 92.

Professor Mason was oppressed by the isolation of college teachers of French in the United States. To give them a common forum, a sense of unity, and some scholarly direction, he founded the *French Review* in 1926 and served as its first editor. Prompted by the same impulses, in 1936 he organized an informal annual meeting of the college teachers of Romance Languages in New York State, outside of the metropolis. This group still meets regularly each fall.

Professor Mason deserves to be called a great teacher. His cynical wit delighted undergraduates, who swarmed into his courses, particularly his Survey of French Literature, which was regarded as an essential for the well-rounded undergraduate in Arts. Graduate students adored him and imitated him, carrying some of his mannerisms afar in the land. And he had a profound influence on a group of young men who would meet for coffee every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at ten o'clock, to whom he played the role of Socrates.

Proud of his New England background, he enjoyed his reputation of a stern disciplinarian, yet he was at heart a kind and compassionate person.

For a number of years Professor Mason taught a Summer School seminar made up of a devoted group of school teachers and advanced students who vied with each other to see who could read the most books in current literature each winter season. It appeared to be the goal of the disciples to try to read more good books than the master.

Professor Mason's entire teaching career, his active professional life, was given to Cornell. What he gave to Cornell was immeasurable, but it exists in the minds and memories of many an old Comellian.

Blanchard L. Rideout, Morris Bishop