T. S. Eliot Is Guest of the University

Noted poet and critic, grandson of university’s founder, is leader, with Paul Elmer More ’87, in New Humanist movement.

T. S. ELIOT, grandson of the Rev. Dr. William Greenleaf Eliot, Washington University’s founder and third chancellor, was the guest of the university on January 16 and 17. Called by Dr. Paul Elmer More ’87 “perhaps the most distinguished man of letters today in the English-speaking world,” Mr. Eliot has returned to this country after 18 years in England to give a series of lectures at Harvard. While in St. Louis he gave a university lecture to 1,000 people on “The Study of Shakespearean Criticism,” and was entertained at a tea in the Women’s Building and a dinner given by Chancellor George R. Throop. He stayed with his aunt and uncle, Professor and Mrs. Holmes Smith. Professor Smith is head of the Department of History of Art in the College of Liberal Arts.

Mr. Eliot’s return to the United States has evoked greater interest than any other purely academic event of the year to date. With the possible exception of Edith Wharton, no American writer has attracted more attention from influential leaders in Europe. He went away practically unknown; he returns famous as a poet, a critic, and an editor.

A Native St. Louisan

Born in St. Louis in 1888, T. S. Eliot was educated at Smith Academy, Harvard, the Sorbonne, and Oxford. For many years he has made his home in England, where he is now a naturalized citizen. His influence during the dozen years of his public career stands in amazing contrast to the small volume of his work. He has written eleven books of poetry and prose, the last of which, his Selected Essays, appeared in 1932. But ever since 1920 when his first book, The Sacred Wood, appeared, his every pronouncement has been followed with close attention by an ever-increasing number of alert minds. His books have been re-read and studied, and his magazine, the Criterion, now completing its tenth year, has been one of the most influential English publications of the post-war period. In poetry, to which he owes in greatest part his reputation, he has been perhaps the most widely imitated of all moderns.

Competent critics on both sides of the Atlantic consider Eliot a man of extraordinary talents though not the type of writer who usually receives official recognition. Once a satirist and a rebel, he has become a defender of a highly intellectual kind of authoritarianism in politics and religion as well as in literature. But he has achieved a solid fame without ever saying or writing anything which seems likely to be popular. Eliot’s position involves a drastic criticism of most of the things that have been the pride of the modern world, and bases itself firmly on a return to the older traditions of philosophy and faith. “The homeward march of the intellect of Europe” is a phrase which has been applied to the worldwide movement of which T. S. Eliot is so effective and engaging a champion.

A recent issue of the Bookman expresses the opinion that “nothing more salutary” than the return of Mr. Eliot “could happen to the course of literature and ideas in America. Eliot is one of the ablest spokesmen for a point of view and a set of ideas which are slowly coming to occupy the position to which they are rightfully entitled.”

Dr. More His Associate

The American most closely associated with Mr. Eliot in the New Humanist movement is Dr. Paul Elmer More, whom Dean Otto Heller recently called “unquestionably one of the most eminent alumni of Washington University, and undoubtedly one of the most distinguished men of letters America has ever produced.” Dr. More holds three Washington University degrees. In 1887 he received his A.B., in 1892 a Master’s degree, and in 1913, in recognition of his position in the literary world, an honorary LL.D. He also holds degrees from Harvard, Glasgow, Columbia, Dartmouth, and Princeton.

Following his graduation from Washington, he taught at Harvard and Bryn Mawr, later becoming literary editor of the Independent.

Continued on page 7.