

An Imperturbable Man of Integrity

By Marjorie Clay

With President Cross in the last week of his twenty-five years

Photographed by Robert E. Fields, Jr.

The scene was a familiar one. George Lynn Cross, who has served longer than any other man as President of the University of Oklahoma, sat in his large red leather chair behind the uncluttered desk. It was his last full week as OU's seventh President. In a few days he would turn over the administration of the University to Dr. J. Herbert Hollomon, and he and Mrs. Cross would leave for Greece with an Alumni Association tour, which would spend three weeks visiting the Aegean Islands.

Dr. Cross was using these last days going over the accumulations of twenty-five years in deciding which files should make the move to his new office on the second floor of the Botany-Microbiology Building. It was characteristic that the bustle and disorderliness which usually accompany such a move were missing. Dr. Cross was, as always, immaculately groomed and enormously calm. One of his most remarkable traits has been the ability to smother potential panic during times of stress—and there have been such periods in his more than two decades in Evans Hall—with an almost icy patience and calmness. If he seemed even more relaxed than usual, it was understandable. The pressures of twenty-five years were soon to be lifted. He did not seem unhappy about the prospect.

"It's like being on a long trip," he said. "When you once start back, you just want to get home." A thoughtful pause as he reached for his ever-present pipe, and then, quietly, "I think that's the way Mrs. Cross and I both feel—we're going home."

For Dr. George L. Cross and Mrs. Cross, the University's gracious first lady, the trip has indeed been a long one, spanning the tragedies and tri-

umphs of a quarter-century, the dreams and disasters of two generations. "Maybe I'm bored, as well as a little tired, with the same problems coming up again and again, year after year, never being able to get more money and always interpreting panty raids," he said. "I'm sort of relieved by it all. I'm rather tired of the responsibility, of trying to get things done and getting other people to do things."

Without apologies, Dr. Cross confesses that the job is strenuous, the hours are long, and the load is more than he wants to carry any longer. "My twenty-five years as President might be an indictment against me," he said with a smile. "Some people feel if you do the job properly, you won't last that long." But there's little doubt in the minds of an overwhelming majority of faculty, students, and the public that George Lynn Cross has done an admirable job. Many insist it has been brilliant. It is testimony to his effectiveness that his stature has grown through the years. Through controversy and crisis, respect for him has increased, rather than diminished.

"He has his own style," says Dr. J. Clayton Feaver, David Ross Boyd Professor of Philosophy. "I haven't run on to anyone who hits it quite as he does." And David Burr, recently named Vice President of the University Community and for twelve years assistant to Dr. Cross, says simply, "He's a man of incredible integrity."

For twenty-four years, a set of statuary has occupied a place of prominence in the President's office, often on or near the Regents' conference table. The three pieces depict a baseball rhubarb. Two players, wearing uniforms of opposing teams and expressions of belligerence, are engaged in an obviously heated discussion with the third figure, a smaller man dressed in the traditional black

garb of an umpire and standing stoically, resolutely, silently.

"The little guy is the president," explained Dr. Cross. "I've always been impressed with his imperturbable, inscrutable expression. He's not to be intimidated, but he's not quite certain of the situation. I think I know how he feels."

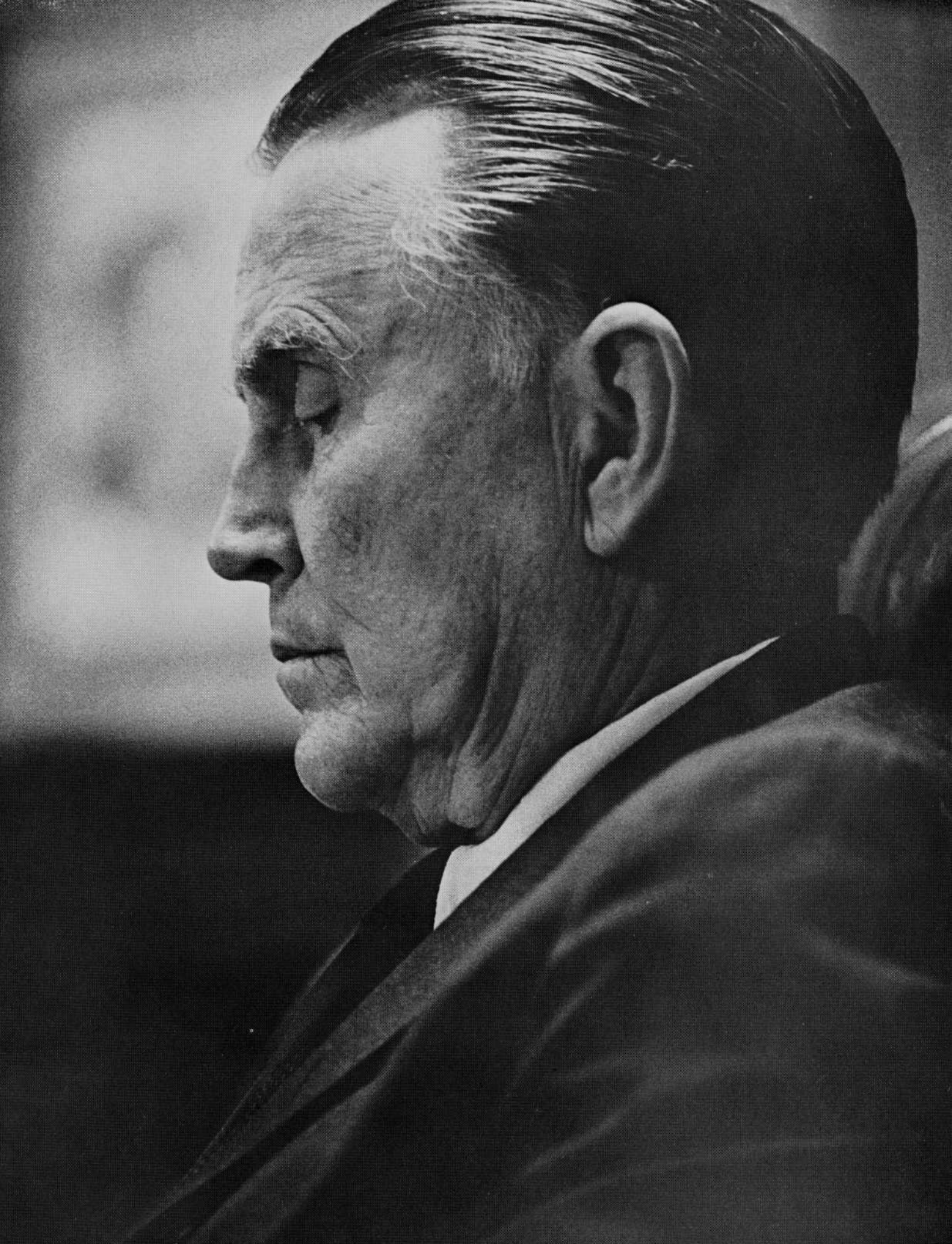
The figures were not the only objects in the President's office that brought comment from Dr. Cross. Over a case filled with books published by the University of Oklahoma Press hung a Auca blow-gun donated by the sister of a missionary killed in Ecuador. "Do you realize," he said, cocking his head to one side, "that I have enough arrows tipped with curare to immobilize the entire legislature? An intriguing thought. Yes, very intriguing."

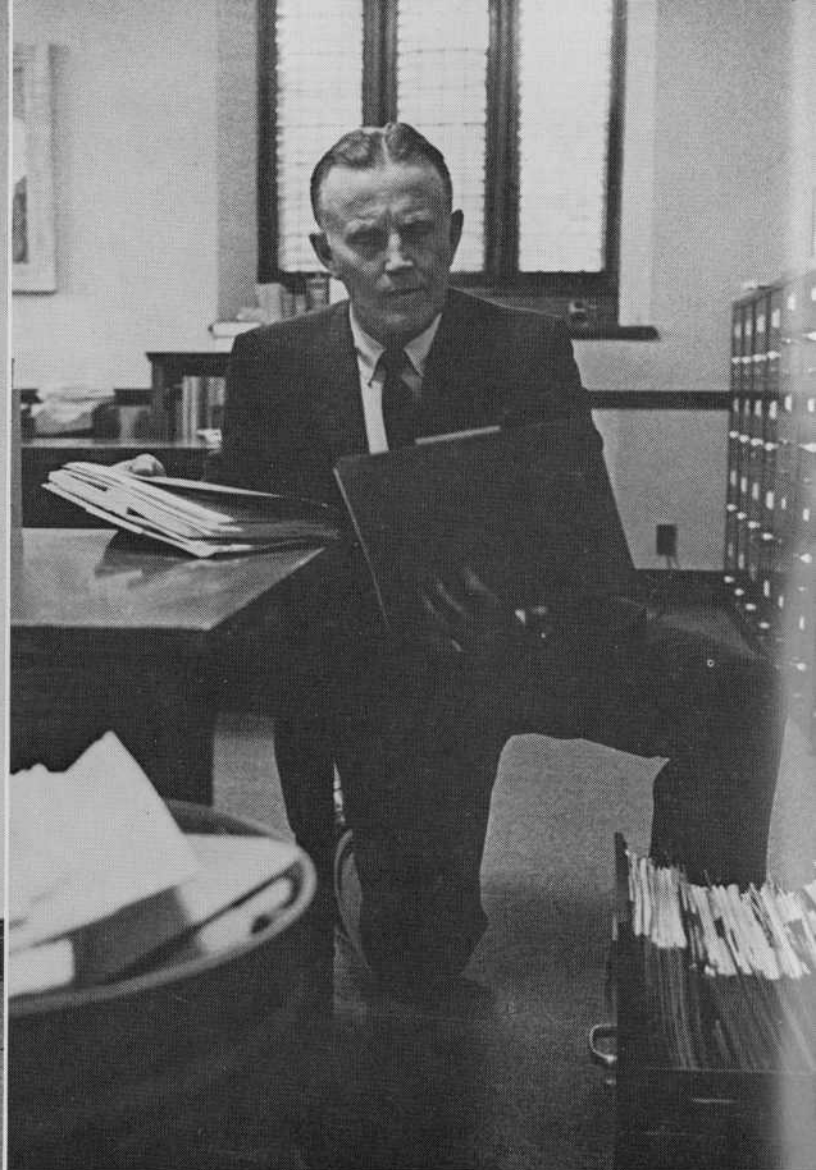
But though the thought of immobilizing the legislature might intrigue him at times, Dr. Cross' relationship with the group has been surprisingly peaceful and often humorous. "On the whole I have gotten along very well with the legislature," he said. "I've only been investigated by them three times and exonerated each time."

One of his remarks to a legislative group in the early Fifties has been one of his most memorable quotes. Dr. Cross had appeared at an appropriation committee meeting of the legislature and for almost an hour had outlined OU's budgetary problems. "Then an old senator stood up and asked me why OU needed money," Cross recalled. "I thought what the hell and answered, 'I want to build a university of which the football team can be proud.'"

"They laughed," Cross added, "but they didn't give me any money." The incident was not a total loss, however; the quotation was lifted from the local newspapers and reprinted in *Reader's Digest*. Dr. Cross received \$10 for its use.

A junior in the University, Marjorie Clay is a staff writer for Sooner Magazine.





Money is still a problem for OU, and Dr. Cross predicts it will continue to be one of the University's main concerns. "The most frustrating aspect about this job is not being able to get enough money to exploit the potential that is here—to take advantage of the capacity, the people, and ideas we have at OU. I've not been able to get the money needed to put these ideas into effect. OU may be trying to do more things than it is able to do with the money it has. We need to find out in what areas our greatness lies, isolate these areas, identify them, and invest in them."

For Dr. Cross, who from necessity has seen the college presidency become highly involved with fund-raising, the primary responsibility of a college president lies in interpreting the university to the public. "And sometimes," he noted, "interpreting the public to the university."

He believes the task of interpreta-

tion is one which has become more difficult in recent years. "Students are making demands that they have a part in matters that concern them. They have evidence that the older generation has flubbed, and some of this evidence is rather convincing.

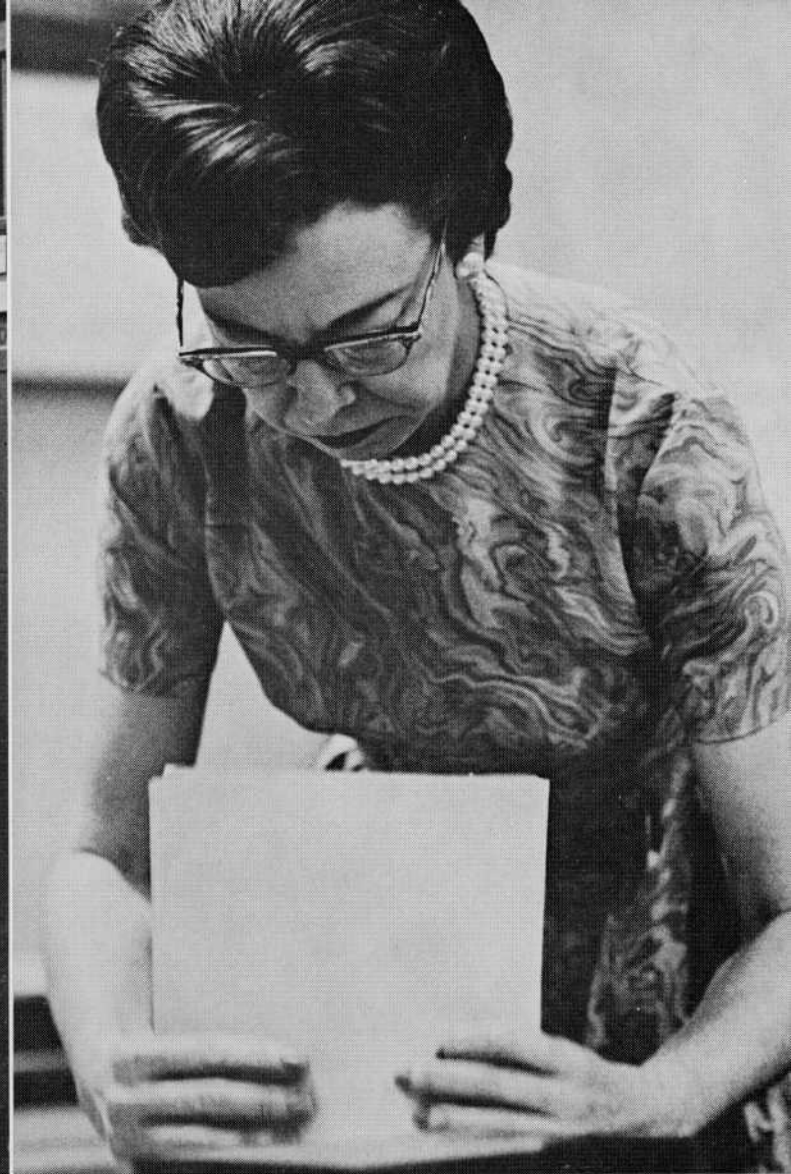
"Since these youngsters have no faith in the preceding generations and, therefore, no faith in parental guidance, they resent what they refer to as the *in loco parentis* concept—that the university should take the place of the parents while the students are away from home."

Dr. Cross indicated that the most important issue facing higher education is how to make it relevant to the students. "I have an uncomfortable feeling that it is already late and that something needs to be done rather promptly if we are to regain the respect and the cooperation of this younger, disturbed, and resentful generation," he said.

"Students see in the world situation the failure of the older generation to use knowledge and power properly. It's preposterous that we have sufficient knowledge and power to contemplate a trip to the moon but we don't have enough knowledge to settle the problems involved in human relations.

"In a sense, we're as primitive as we were at the dawn of civilization. We are barbarians in that respect; the only difference is that we have vastly refined our weapons. It's damned silly—it's tragic—that the same resources which make interplanetary flight possible haven't been used to solve our neighborhood problems.

"People are so enormously complex. When Alexander Pope said the proper study of mankind is man, he didn't say how we are to study man, and it seems we still don't know the right approach. Our studies are seg-



mented—learning is compartmentalized—and it's difficult to apply the whole of our knowledge to any particular problem.

"I frankly can't see any change in the immediate future, but I feel this is an absolute must in the next decade or two. The problems inherent in the human race haven't been understood by the human race, and so human relations have become the Achilles' heel of our species. And it may be the factor that destroys us. If we don't make some changes rather quickly, we're about through as a civilization."

There have been many changes at OU during the last twenty-five years, and Dr. Cross has figured significantly in most of them. With the obvious physical growth has come a growing understanding of the need for a vital, free institution dedicated to intellectual inquiry. Academic freedom, a part of this concept, has been

an issue which has reoccurringly aroused controversy. Dr. Cross has been its unwavering defender and interpreter.

"I think students sense that knowledge is power and that the university is the key to this power," he said. "They're asking if the university can do anything and they believe that education as they have known it has failed to answer that question. There can be no thought of gaining a relevant education without academic freedom. The folly of attempts to suppress free exploration of ideas has been demonstrated repeatedly throughout history. It need not be demonstrated again.

"I have been criticized for permitting Paul Boutelle's appearance on our campus as a corruption of academic freedom (Sooner Magazine, Nov. 1967). I have had it 'explained' to me time after time that freedom of speech doesn't mean a Boutelle can

From the receptionists in the outer office (left) to President Cross' secretary, Miss Ada Arnold (far right) to the man himself, things were typically calm and under control during the last days of the Cross administration, much of the time of which was spent in deciding the fate of files and mementos accumulated during twenty-five years in the same office (center photos).

come to OU. But it's not Boutelle's right to speak that concerns me—it's the students' right to hear Boutelle.

"I have pointed out, or have tried to point out, that Boutelle's being here did not involve *his* right of academic freedom or *his* right of free speech, because certainly he had no right to speak on our campus. No one has the 'right' to libel or vilify the President of the United States or call the flag a rag, but the students do have a right to *know* about Mr. Boutelle. They have a right to listen, hear, and explore all his ideas and to express opinions concerning them. It's the Boutelles in the world who

start riots and burn cities. If our students study him as a symptom of a social disorder in relation to the social situation which produced him, their education will be more relevant to the problems that they will face in the future. Because they *will* face Boutelles in life, I feel they should not be protected from Boutelles until the day of their graduation. In fact, to deny them the opportunity to see the diseased portion of society makes as much sense as training a medical student without letting him examine diseased tissue."

Dr. Cross believes this interpretation of academic freedom is consistent with a fundamental change he has watched develop in the function of universities throughout the last quarter century. "The whole concept of the university has changed from the idea that the university is largely a philosophical effort to serve the professions of law and medicine to the idea that a university should be socially and economically useful to people. In a real university you simply cannot afford to deny the exploration of any idea. And, in time, I think the

students will not accept anything less than this."

Another major development which has occurred during his administration is continuing education. "The concept of obsolescence in education and training has developed during the last twenty-five years," he said. "The time when education can be taken in one dose is over. Now, an engineer becomes obsolete in six or seven years.

"Our continuing education center is one of the two or three best such centers in the world. I'm quite proud of it."

There are other aspects of the University of Oklahoma in which he takes pride. "Graduates of our School of Medicine have an easy time getting internships. We have alumni in all the distinguished professions, in politics, governmental service, and executive positions. I'm proud of the physical plant and the buildings we have at OU, but mainly the quality of our programs pleases me. Someday OU may truly be a great university."

A pause, "And of course I'm rather pleased with the facility in which my

new office is located," Dr. Cross said, referring to the nine-story Botany-Microbiology Building constructed in 1965.

Dr. Cross had planned to be President only five years, and even then he and Mrs. Cross feared it would be too late to re-enter a scientific field. "It's fortunate for him that he's a botanist," Mrs. Cross joked. "Plants stay the same."

"We always felt we were temporary here," she said. "We thought we'd try it five years, then it stretched to ten. If I had known we'd stay twenty-five years, I might have gotten around to fixing the President's Home the way I would have liked."

But after living for so long in a "temporary" home, Mrs. Cross is ready for what she jokingly calls the big heave. "I've moved so seldom in my life that it will really be an adventure. And I've waited forty-four years to build our first home."

Mrs. Cross confessed that her husband may have indulged her request to build their own home initially because of her insistence. "But now I



think he's getting a bigger kick out of it than I am," she said with a smile. "He checks on the progress daily, and he understands what the men are doing, too."

Few people know what a great lover of art he is, Mrs. Cross said. "By virtue of his presidency he served as a director of the William Rockhill Nelson Trust to maintain the Nelson Art Gallery in Kansas City. He started studying about art so he could deal responsibly with the gallery, and when my husband goes out for anything, he goes full tilt.

"I've taken several courses in art, but he's left me far behind. It's a joy to go to museums and art galleries with him."

Dr. Cross also has a profound appreciation for music, especially the more modern type. Said Mrs. Cross, "He seems to be satisfied with the purposes underlying modern music, but I'm left in a state of confusion by it. He doesn't think it's as ridiculous as I do. I think he sees what's trying to be achieved." As a matter of fact, Mrs. Cross said that in their new home the hi-fi will be in his room and the family living room will have the stereo. "He plays records very loudly," she laughed, "and now we'll be able to shut him up with it."

She eagerly awaits the change of pace. "I'm so glad that I can have more leisure time. I have bookmarks in almost all the books in our house and I think I'm going to enjoy moving them back." Mrs. Cross also looks forward to settling down in a new house, and the prospects of travel without the weight of the University on her husband's shoulders pleases her. High on her list of priorities are sewing and ceramics, but gardening is out. "My husband made me promise I won't garden at our new house. It's one place where I'm a total failure, even though I'm a botanist too."

I had been talking to Mrs. Cross in the formal living room of the stately old President's Home on the corner of Boyd and University, and while we discussed gardening, Dr. Cross walked in. "Your opinions on where to put plants is interesting," was his only comment. "Actually," Mrs. Cross confided, "when he sees what I've done he just can't say anything for a while."

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A Man of Integrity

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Dr. Cross praises his wife for her role as the first lady of the University and for being a helpful companion. "She's been a very busy woman, and she's worked hard. That Distinguished Service Citation she received this year at commencement was as deserved as any the University has granted.

"She's passed up opportunities for her own career in order to handle her University obligations," he said. "I'm sure like me she will be glad for the relief from the pressure. A President can't make any plans because invariably a crisis comes to unsettle them. I enjoyed travel, but by the time I returned, my desk would be buried with business. Now, at least, there won't be the pressure to go through it immediately."

Dr. Cross indicated that there are some trout in the Sierras that might find themselves at the end of a fishing line. "I usually bring 'em back," he said with a grin, "but I have some stories, too. However, I consider a 25 percent mark-up either on length or weight legitimate. When John Jacobs [OU's track coach from 1922-1957] weighed his new-born son on his fish scales, the lad registered 24 pounds."

Dr. Cross also plans to teach Botany 21, a beginning course entitled "Plant Kingdom," this fall at OU. "I enjoy teaching more than anything else I've ever done," he said, gazing at the botany books to the left of his desk. "It's quite possible that it won't be the same as I remember it. You return to your home town with nostalgia, but it's not always the place you left. If I enjoy teaching, I'll teach one course each fall until mandatory retirement; if I don't enjoy it, I won't teach."

In order to refresh his memory, he audited the course last year from Dr. Elroy Rice, professor of botany. Dr. Cross taught the course to Rice twenty-seven years ago. Says Rice: "He was a great professor then, and he'll be a great one now."

Dr. Cross also plans to write a history of the University. "I hope to get a couple of books out of my career.

One will be a humorous, light-hearted account of the life and times of a college president; the other will be a more serious effort to express my views on academic administration."

There is a quality about George Lynn Cross that makes writing about him difficult. In spite of extensive interview notes, good intentions, clippings, and a willing typewriter, there is something about the man that eludes expression, that defies definition. Perhaps it's his stature as an administrator, his integrity as a person. It might well include the overwhelming task of grasping the full significance of his long term as president of OU, of seeing behind the events and decisions of a quarter-century the character and strength of the man who has guided the University.

Whatever that elusive quality is, others have seen it—his colleagues, his associates, his wife, his family, and his students—and they are quick to praise.

Says Cleo Cross: "I was the first person to discover my husband's ability, because he's so quiet. But I've never met anyone who could iron out troubles and misunderstandings as well as he can.

"He has always wanted to be in a position where he'd never have to make a decision that would be unethical and dishonest. At the very first we started what George irreverently refers to as the 'Go-to-Hell Fund.' We expected trouble with the Regents, and we wanted to be in a position where we could give the job back to them if necessary. We never had to."

Mrs. Cross believes his self-discipline, the respect he has for individual dignity, and his sense of humor have carried her husband through the last twenty-five years. "I've scarcely ever seen him angry. One of his favorite statements to me when I'm fussing about someone's incompetency is, 'Well, no one intends to be stupid. We're all products of our genes and our environment.'

"I've never seen him panic, unless it

would be at a wrestling match, and then he goes through all kinds of contortions. It's hilarious to watch him."

David Burr, who has been close to Dr. Cross, tells of his enormous patience with people and projects and of his dry sense of humor. "He is a tremendously humorous person," Burr says, "but the trouble is, it's hard to tell when he's being humorous. He never changes expression.

"He has a great deal of faith in his fellow man and especially in the people of Oklahoma. I heard him say on one occasion that we must approach each day's problems with the knowledge that throughout history the good in man always outweighs the bad, although perhaps only slightly. I'm sure he has faith that this also will be the case in the future."

Dr. J. Clayton Feaver describes Dr. Cross as a vitally concerned and deeply committed person. "There has been developed under his administration a remarkably fine foundation on which to build," says Feaver. "He's a person of unusual commitment to the objectives of higher education and thoroughly loyal to his own institution. He's done a remarkable job in the situation, and he's one of the finest persons I've worked with."

And Ada Arnold, his secretary since 1950, calls Dr. Cross "one of the finest—and fairest—men I've ever known. One of his favorite comments around the office is, 'This, too, will pass.' He can do only so much and he does laugh—he has to laugh to keep going. I don't believe I've ever known anyone who works as well with time as he does. He never does just nothing. He knows exactly how much time it takes him to walk to the house from the office, or drive to town. He won't slow down after retirement—slower just isn't the word to describe Dr. Cross. He's going to be busy, but he won't have the pressure."

For the Crosses, the list of tributes seems endless and the admiration and respect deeply gratifying. "This year has been a constant reminder of all the good things," says Mrs. Cross. "Students come up and thank us and we've had marvelous letters from parents. The dinners and tributes have

come in such rapid succession that we found it difficult to keep up with them. In every way this has been the best year of our career." The year also marked the attainment of a goal. "We wanted to retire as soon as we were able so we could carry out some of our longings," she says. "We both have looked forward to the time when we could relax and enjoy having worked hard. George has put us in a perfect position; if he had worked much longer, the good years would not be with us.

"Retirement is almost wasted on old people. We'll pick up where we left off twenty-five years ago."

For three years as a student at the University of Oklahoma I had heard Dr. Cross at freshman convocations and senior commencements. I had listened to his remarks on housing at the steps of the Administration Building, and at an informal reception for Bishop Pike and Dr. Thomas Altizer I had heard his comments on academic freedom. During these three years I had been impressed with his

competence, his fairness, and his skill in handling difficult situations, and I had agreed with the observation that as a president he did, indeed, seem "unflappable."

But when I met Dr. George Lynn Cross in person, I found a man who was more than a skilled administrator and leader, more than an imperturbable umpire and able speaker. Behind the President I found the teacher and I saw a truly great man. Dr. Cross stands tall and he is, in fact, a man of "incredible integrity." ●

Campus Notes

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vocate lawlessness, violence, or violent overthrow of the government. Blankenship said the provisions for determining such a judgment were too vague and that persons were in effect being found guilty of crimes before their commission.

Our Scholars Grow

The University Scholars program was established in 1963 to meet the needs of especially gifted high-school graduates. Each spring tests and interviews are held on the campus for the several hundred high-school seniors who compete for the fifty to sixty places in each fall class of Scholars. Because the response has been so great, the competition so keen, and the program so successful, the 1968-69 class of University Scholars will be double the size of the five preceding classes. A total of 130 students from thirty-nine Oklahoma cities and towns and nine other states have been named Scholars for the fall term. The enlargement was announced this spring by the group's co-sponsors, Dr. J. R. Morris and Dr. Stephen M. Sutherland, dean and assistant dean, respectively, of University College. Said Morris: "The caliber of this year's applicants was the highest in the history of the program, and though we doubled the class size we were still unable to accommodate many qualified students."

The scholars meet weekly for informal discussions with top faculty members from a variety of disciplines, and they receive special assistance in planning academic programs tailored to their personal talents, interests, and career goals.

Sports Briefs

When *Harold Keith* steps down as Oklahoma sports information director a year from now, he will be succeeded by his son, *John Keith*, 35, assistant sports publicist at Kansas State, won the position after a series of competitive interviews before the athletic council which chose him unanimously over the other candidates, Athletic Director Gomer Jones announced

in June. The younger Keith, a political science graduate of Central State of Edmond, will work one year as an assistant before heading the department when his father retires July 1, 1969. John Keith worked as sports writer and sports cartoonist on newspapers at Colorado Springs, Colo., Boulder, Colo., Oklahoma City, and Tulsa before going to Kansas State as assistant to publicist Dev Nelson.

Woodrow W. Kerr, professional-manager-superintendent of the Chickasha Golf and Country club, on July 1 assumed a similar capacity at the University golf course.

Jerry LaPalme, senior golfer, was killed with his father June 7 in an automobile accident near his home at Putnam, Conn. LaPalme had just graduated at Norman in marketing. He is survived by his wife Terry and an infant daughter. He usually played number one for the Sooners. He planned to attend a professional golf school in Florida next fall and try the professional route.

Gary Lower is OU's new cross country coach and assistant track coach. The 32-year-old Shawnee native, who holds BA and MA degrees from Central State College, comes to the University from U.S. Grant High School in Oklahoma City, where he had been track coach since 1963. From 1958 until 1963 Lower coached football and track at Oklahoma City's Northeast High School. He developed conference and regional champions at both schools and this year was elected High School Coach-of-the-Year for Region Seven. His Grant track team finished second in the 1968 state meet.

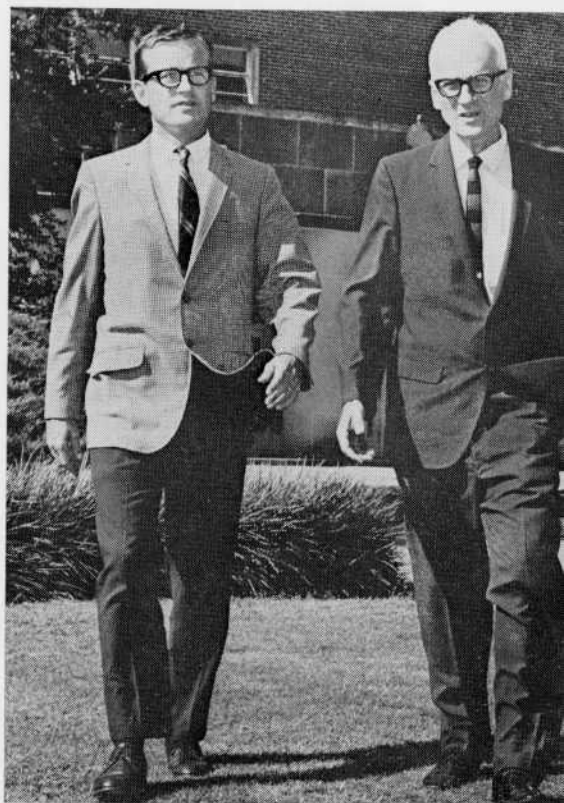
Lower will assist Coach J. D. Martin with the indoor and outdoor track teams at OU and will coach the Sooners' cross country team, whose season fills the early fall. Martin formerly had the responsibility for all three teams.

Our Man in England

The best and the worst of three years as a Rhodes Scholar in England are the

same thing to Bill McGrew, 1965 OU graduate. The hardest part has been adjusting to the differences between academic systems. At the same time, McGrew says, the greatest benefit is the self-reliance that is developed by Oxford's demanding system.

McGrew was named a Rhodes Scholar in 1965 when he received a BS from the University. He recently returned to the United States before his fourth year abroad to present a paper in Atlanta, Ga., at the International Congress of Primatology sponsored by the Yerkes Primate Research Center. The trip to the congress gave him a chance to see his family in Norman, where his father, Dr. William C. McGrew, is a professor of accounting. Bill and his wife, the former Penny Isom who graduated from OU in 1966, also visited her parents in Tulsa.



The Keiths

Filial transition in sports publicity