

# The first alumnus commencement speaker

BY WALTER FERGUSON, '07

THE announcement that George B. Parker, '08as, of New York, has been selected to deliver the annual address at the Commencement Exercises at the University of Oklahoma in June of this year brings to light the fact that Mr Parker is the first Sooner graduate to be called to this distinction. Mr Parker was graduated in the class of 1908, after spending four years on the Sooner campus. He has a number of classmates in Tulsa, and visits here frequently. He was a member of a famous party, composed of Irvin Cobb, Roy Howard, Ray Long, Rex Beach and others, who spent some time in Tulsa about five years ago prior to a ten day's hunting trip in the Salt Plains country near Cherokee.

"Deac" Parker, a native of Michigan came to Norman in the fall of 1904. His brother-in-law, Dr. James Sturgis, was a professor of ancient languages in the primitive state school. Like all Michigan high school graduates his educational hopes were centered in Ann Arbor, but an interested older sister wanted him with her, and Oklahoma became and has always remained his adopted home. During Mr Parker's student days the agitation to establish college fraternities occurred on the campus of the young school, and the first to establish a chapter was Kappa Alpha (Southern), of which Mr Parker became a charter member, and secretary.

Mr Parker's intimate school associations were with a group of young fellows with their minds made up to enter the newspaper business. From this group he received the inspiration to fit himself for that profession, and he counted on its being his life work on leaving school.

A very talented and striking student instructor, Miss Adelaide Loomis, was assisting Professor Vernon L. Parrington, head of the English Department, who was later to win the Pulitzer Prize for Literature. Parker enrolled in one of Miss Loomis' classes in order to acquire a more definite idea of English construction, and shortly enrolled in all of her classes to get a more definite idea of Miss Loomis. Finding Miss Loomis' English so perfect, and so indispensable

to his future work, he later persuaded her to become Mrs Parker, a job she still holds, having taken on the additional management of two husky youngsters, George B. jr., and Mary.

Following his graduation in 1908, Mr Parker was employed for a short time by a tax ferret concern, but at the very first opportunity he landed a reporter's job on the *Daily Oklahoman* under the benevolent and kindly eye of Colonel Roy Stafford.

About this time the Scripps-McRae League was starting on its program of expansion, and included in their efforts was the starting of a new afternoon paper in Oklahoma City. The city editor who was sent there to establish this paper was J. W. (Jack) Foster. In looking around for talent with which to build up a staff, he naturally surveyed the facilities offered by the *Daily Oklahoman*. He read one or two of Mr Parker's items, and they were written in such perfect English, although of little importance, that he asked the young reporter to join his staff. Mr Parker was a little reluctant to leave the *Oklahoman*, where he was getting \$12.00 a week on an established paper, whereas the *News* was an experiment. However, the *Oklahoman* declined to appraise his services as worth \$15.00, which the *News* had offered, and he switched his affections from Fourth street to Grand avenue, and became a "leg man."

It was not many months until the rapid changes which occur in an expanding organization brought Mr Parker to the city editor's desk, and not so very long after, other shifts made him the editor of the *Oklahoma News*. He was practically unknown, and the paper had but a small circulation. The field was crowded with older and more influential journals, and Mr Parker set himself to the earnest task of gaining circulation and the attention of the growing metropolis of Oklahoma. He founded in that paper a personally written column under the title "The Referee." It did not attract much attention at first, but quietly and unostentatiously it found itself gaining the interest and admiration of Oklahoma City. The resources of the *News* were very limited, and in the meantime

the *Oklahoman* had bought the old *Oklahoman City Times*, giving them a morning and an afternoon paper. It was a tough fight to go up against a powerful combination like the older paper maintained. They had, and would spend money to develop "reader interest." One of the greatest news stories that ever broke in the history of Oklahoma was the killing of Jake Hamon, Republican national committeeman, and a personal friend of President-elect Harding. Hamon was shot down in an Ardmore hotel by Clara Smith. It was expected that Hamon was to be in President Harding's Cabinet three months later and, of course, the eyes of the nation shifted to the Ardmore scandal. Details of the sordid affair were more sought after than in the case of any other news story ever occurring within the borders of Oklahoma. With its financial resources the *Oklahoman* landed on top. A Hearst representative, who had followed Clara Smith into Mexico, obtained from her a "Diary" to be supplemented by a lurid imagination, and presented a continued story, which was to thrill the nation. The *Oklahoman* secured its exclusive publication for the state in which the killing occurred, and in which there was the most intense interest. Mr Parker could not get anyone to look at a copy of the *News* so long as this Clara Smith story was running full blast in the morning rival. It was up to him to discount the feature, or be submerged by it. Working under the stress of desperation, he constructed a burlesque serial, and when the saffron details of Clara appeared in the morning, Mr Parker's burlesque would come out in the afternoon, not only ridiculing the "Diary" but covering a range of Oklahoma politics. Attention was immediately switched from the *Oklahoman's* prize feature to the new one created by Mr Parker, and the sensational feature acquired with so much effort and so much cost by the morning paper was laughed from Page One to the Want Ad Section. The make-up editor seriously considered killing it before the last installment was run. Not only did the feature attract wide-spread interest in Oklahoma, but slipped over the boundaries, and was pointed out by all discerning newspaper men as one of the finest examples of newspaper enterprise and technique ever devised. It was not many days afterwards until Mr Parker received a telegram from Robert P. Scripps, a name unfamiliar to him, advising him that he had been appointed editor of the *Cleveland (Ohio), Press*, the parent institution of the Scripps chain. Reluctant to leave Oklahoma, and fearful to take on the responsibilities of the oldest and most powerful publication of a growing group, Mr Parker hesitated, but on the day directed by Scripps' telegram he was in Cleveland,

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Cherry street, Drumright, Oklahoma, is instructor in journalism in Drumright high school.

### 1931

Dr. Roy A. Morter, '31med, medical superintendent of Kalamazoo State hospital, Kalamazoo, Michigan, was recently elected president of the Kalamazoo Academy of Medicine.

Johannes Malthaner, '31M.A., instructor in the University of Oklahoma, plans to leave for Germany in May, 1933, in order to visit his relatives and to study at the University of Heidelberg.

### 1932

George O. Hopkins, '32journal, has received an appointment as editor of the National Editorial association bulletin and service letter in the Chicago office.

Anne Sarah Robinette, '32as, is teaching in the public schools of Oklahoma City. Her home address is 900 Northwest Thirteenth street.

Charles Grady, '32as, 1514 Northwest Twenty-ninth street, is teaching history in Harding Junior high school, Oklahoma City.

### 1933

A play, "B. M. O. C.," written by Ernie Hill, '33journal, Norman, was broadcast over WKY, Oklahoma City, by remote control from WNAD, university radio station, Wednesday night, February 15.



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and an adopted Oklahoman was on his way to stardom in the Newspaper World.

He remained as editor of the *Cleveland Press* for about two years, and then a new position was created for him. He was made Editor-in-Chief with the responsibility of directing all of the papers in what was known as the Southwestern Group, making his headquarters at Houston, Texas, and looking after the production of the papers in Oklahoma City, Fort Worth, Houston, Memphis, Birmingham, El Paso and Albuquerque. Two years of steady application to this assignment demonstrated to Bob Scripps and Roy Howard, the latter having come into the firm as a partner, that Mr Parker was the man to direct the editorial destinies of the entire group. He was transferred to Washington, and put in charge of the editorial end of the entire Scripps-Howard group. He later moved to Cleveland for several years, and directed the work from there. In 1929, following the purchase of the *New York Telegram*, and the *Pittsburgh Press*, he was transferred to New York, and made Editor-in-Chief of the organization and a partner in the concern. With the active editorial direction of twenty-five aggressive American daily papers, Mr Parker now holds what is considered the biggest newspaper job in America.

His intense interest in Oklahoma has never abated, and he and his family have always considered it their home. One of the most striking things he has ever done in an editorial way was during the Walton war, when it looked like the streets of Oklahoma City would run

red with blood, and that grim tragedy would follow in the wake of impassioned politics. The then editor of the *Oklahoma News*, Morrison Toomer, was fatally ill in an Oklahoma City hospital. Mr Parker was residing in Houston, giving his attention to the direction of the S. W. Group. With the emergency arising for clear headed responsible direction Mr Parker rushed back to his old desk on the *Oklahoma News*. He ended the tense situation with a striking and dramatic editorial, which covered the entire front page of his paper under the caption "We want neither Klan nor King," setting out on one hand the excesses of Walton's military rule, and on the other the dangers that might come from the Hooded Empire, charting the straight course for the clear-thinking man to follow, and raising the flag under which the middle citizen could enlist. The tense situation collapsed with the publication of this editorial, and it was perhaps more due to Mr Parker than any other individual that the threatened disasters of this dangerous situation never occurred.

Mr Parker visits Oklahoma at every opportunity, always returning, if possible, for the annual Homecoming game on the university campus. He prefers to spend his vacations at the famous T-Bone Ranch on the edge of the Salt Plains near Cherokee, Oklahoma, and when he comes back to make the university address twenty-four years after his graduation, it will be as the Sooner school's most distinguished alumnus.



## A GREAT JURIST

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to us in the field of teaching and education?

I take it there are two types of teachers as there are two classes of judges—one that helps to mold thought and the other that is content to reflect or tries to reflect the thought generally prevailing at the moment.

Justice Holmes once said: "No doubt every calling is great when greatly pursued." Of his own he wrote: "Law is the business to which my life is devoted, and I should show less than devotion if I did not do what in me lies to improve it, and when I perceive what seems to me the ideal of its future, if I hesitated to point it out, and to press toward it with all my heart."

From various sources I have gathered a few gems of thought, pearls of wisdom, that reveal profound truths and were exemplified in his life. They grow in beauty and power as their meaning is sensed. The first one might well have been written for the teaching profession. He said:

"The main part of intellectual edu-

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