

SOONER MAGAZINE

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William Bennett Bizzell, 1876-1944

The passing of President Emeritus W. B. Bizzell leaves his friends and associates with such a deep sense of personal loss that it is difficult to attempt an objective evaluation of his achievements for the University of Oklahoma.

His numerous contributions to higher standards of scholarship; his leadership in improving the University's physical plant and its maintenance; his inspiring vision of the true objectives of a University, are well known to most alumni. This is not the time nor the place to list these items again.

Instead, we extend a loving farewell to a great spirit, to a man whose personal qualities were such that he would have been outstanding in any occupational field he chose.

It is indicative of his character and aspirations, however, that he selected the field of education for his life's work. To a man of his vision, his understanding of the evils of ignorance, and his broad knowledge of the benefits of education, it was inevitable that he would select higher education as the field in which he might make the greatest possible contribution to the advancement of mankind.

President Bizzell did not see higher education in a narrow, formal sense. His conception was that a state university had an obligation to serve the interests of all the people of its state and its region. In conceiving and establishing the University of Oklahoma Press, and in taking an active interest in all phases of the University's Extension program, he was carrying out his idea of extending the institution's service far beyond the limits of the campus.

A great many persons think of scholarship as being something good for you, like medicine, but a little on the dull side. President Bizzell had an amazing ability to talk about the importance of good scholarship and make it sound exciting. Speaking on a subject that in mouths of most speakers would be commonplace and uninteresting, he could hold an audience intent and deeply impressed by his presentation of what good scholarship really means. Some deep, inner conviction of the basic importance of learning to human progress, plus his masterful use of words to express his thoughts, gave him a remarkable ability to inspire his audiences.

Few men have maintained so thoroughly throughout their lives their mental integrity. Because of his wide reading, his broad experience, his rich background of knowledge from all the ages, and his religious faith, he had a strongly developed sense of right and wrong, a strong distaste for hypocrisy in any form, and a self-sacrificing devotion to duty.

When trying days came, and a few persons in high places became unfriendly and even hostile, President Bizzell displayed the qualities of true greatness. When all his instincts of personal pride and his innate sense of justice were crying aloud for him to strike back publicly at the personal attacks being made on him, he suppressed his personal feelings and in the interest of protecting the good name of the University from public squabbling he kept silent. In the expressive language of today's soldiers, he "sweated it out" and took the punishment in situations where any ordinary man would have felt fully justified in hitting back, or in quitting the job regardless of consequences to the University.

President Bizzell directed the University's affairs for the last third of its first half-century. His ideas, his visions, his achievements are woven brightly into the fabric of the University's history and into its educational program. In a very real sense, his great spirit lives on in whatever service the University gives to mankind in future years.

The Cover

Gene Campbell, '42ba.

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