WILLIAM BENNETT BIZZELL:
BIBLIOPHILE AND BUILDER

By Morris L. Wardell

Dr. William Bennett Bizzell was born October 14, 1876, in Independence, Texas. He graduated from Baylor University with a Bachelor of Science degree in 1898, and a Bachelor of Philosophy in 1900. In 1911 he received a Master of Laws degree from the Illinois College of Law and the degree of Doctor of Civil Law in 1912. He received a Master of Arts degree from the University of Chicago in 1913 and a Doctor of Laws from Baylor University in 1919. Columbia University granted him the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in 1921.

After serving ten years as superintendent of public schools at Navasota, Texas, Dr. Bizzell became president of the College of Industrial Arts at Denton, which position he held from 1910 to 1914. From 1914 until 1925 he was president of the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas. On July 1, 1925, he became president of the University of Oklahoma. He served not only the University but the state as a whole. At the termination of his work as president in 1941 he was made President Emeritus and chairman of the Department of Sociology. During his academic career he was a member of numerous societies, associations, and clubs.

On August 16, 1900, Dr. Bizzell and Carrie Wray Sangster of Navasota were married. One son and one daughter were born to this union—William Sangster and Elaine. Dr. Bizzell died at his home in Norman May 15, 1944, and burial was in Rose Hill Mausoleum, Oklahoma City.

Three years after the establishment of the University of Oklahoma it was reported that 1,800 volumes constituted the entire collection of books. The first president, Dr. David Ross Boyd, was deeply conscious of the need of books and to him goes the credit of initial work. The Library has steadily grown until it now has more than 300,000 volumes.

The Library of the University of Oklahoma, dedicated December 14, 1949, will be known to future generations as The William Bennett Bizzell Memorial Library, and will stand as a monument to the memory of Dr. William Bennett Bizzell, president of the University from 1925 to 1941. He took great pride in making possible the construction of a beautiful building in which is stored for use the learning of the past found on printed pages. He loved and admired not only books

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2 The statue of Dr. Bizzell which stands immediately across the street from The William Bennett Bizzell Memorial Library was unveiled at the dedication of the Library on December 14, 1949. This statue was completed in the summer of 1952, by Joseph Richard Taylor, Professor of Art, who was the designer and sculptor.
but beautiful books; books with historic bindings; bindings that are in themselves works of art; pages that are illuminated; and, in short, fine and good books.

Because of such circumstances as the fire of 1903 which destroyed the Administration Building and the library books, the lack of finances and urgent need of an adequate building in which to house the few books and those to be acquired soon afterwards, the Carnegie Corporation provided funds for a new building. When the library was removed from this building it became the home of the College of Education. The next library building to be constructed is the present Fine Arts Building. It was outgrown within ten years.

When Dr. Bizzell came to the University of Oklahoma in 1925 he saw the need for an adequate library building. Through his efforts, assisted by other lovers of books who also appreciated their value, this present building was constructed. No more appropriate statement can be quoted than the one under his picture in Oklahoma's Crown Jewel, which was issued at the time of dedication of the Library in 1930:

William Bennett Bizzell, president of the University, early set as the goal of the University a library building. Interested in books, himself a collector of rare and precious books, the president regards a library as the touchstone of any university. He had early expressed his wish that the University become a center of research and culture; and by sacrifice made this magnificent Library building possible.

Inaugural ceremonies for Dr. Bizzell were held February 5, 1926. In his inaugural address Dr. Bizzell set forth a program of education which included fundamental aims for the University, objectives that were to be reached through instruction and research which he provided:

1. The development of a more versatile and more conscientious citizenship.
2. The attainment of a more stable and a more satisfying social life.
3. A human product better fortified against human ills and physical deterioration.
4. A widespread dissemination of a knowledge of rational living.
5. Insuring to society a surplus of material goods and social advantages.

Further in the inaugural address appears a statement which shows the conscious effort the leader of the University for sixteen years made to build a good State: "We must never forget that the essential justification for education at public expense in a democracy is training for good citizenship." In closing the inaugural address Dr. Bizzell said, "... I hope to have the courage to do right, the
will to be just, and the Christian virtue of being kindly, sympathetic, and open-minded.” Those who knew him best feel that he accomplished his aim.

It was custom during the presidency of Dr. Bizzell for students to assemble at the beginning of the academic year and listen to a convocational address. These addresses have been brought together in a book bearing the title The Relations of Learning. Here one finds kindly humor, philosophy of life, and advice to seekers of learning. At the end of one convocational address appears three concluding sentences worthy of being read again: “The comradeship of learning involves the spirit of courage and labor. Growth in body, mind and soul will be the rewards for your efforts. With these high purposes, let us unite our efforts in making this a year of great intellectual triumphs and fine companionship.”

In these collected addresses scores of writers are quoted; dozens of books are mentioned; parts of poems appear; and many great characters are named for emulation. This lover of books and contributor to leadership was intellectually effective and kindly convincing when speaking before the students of the University of Oklahoma.

Dr. Bizzell invited men of international and national distinction to the campus to give the students intellectual inspiration. Among these authors and statesmen was Count Carlos Sforza of Italy who was a visiting professor for a month. County Sforza later held a place of importance in the Italian government.3 Eduard Benes of Czechoslovakia came to tell the story of victims of nationalistic aggression. The great Chinese scholar and Ambassador Dr. Hu Shih came twice. Bertrand Russell, Emil Ludwig and Maurice Hindus were other international characters who visited the University. From our own great men a few may be mentioned. Two great Oklahomans, Will Rogers and Don Blanding, came to speak before students and faculty members. Henry Seidel Canby and other literary personages made intellectual adventure appealing to young men and women.

As Dr. Bizzell read books he must have felt with Laurence Sterne who said: “Writing, when properly managed . . . is but a different name for conversation.” Following the pages of an author, Dr. Bizzell must have paused to converse with him. Thus, new ideas were born, new thoughts were catalogued and passed on in further pleasant and profitable conversation with his friends. With humanist, scientist or musician, Dr. Bizzell’s conversation was always enlivening. Like Talleyrand and Metternich, he was happy when talking with those who were clever, brilliant and equipped with the knowledge of the past, conscious of the present, and intelligent enough to project their thinking into the future. It was with such

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3 Count Sforza, who was a friend of Dr. Bizzell, died in 1952.
persons that he could draw upon literature which was a part of his intellectual possession.

Truly educated Dr. Bizzell was philosophical. In seeking knowledge, he discarded useless information and equipped himself with facts that made an intellectual environment conducive to plain living and high thinking. Truth to Dr. Bizzell was not an abstract term. His constant search for principles upon which to base decisions led him to read widely and wisely. His convictions were not founded upon half truths but, as far as time permitted, upon complete investigation.

The lives of great men were not necessarily goals by which he might acquire a place of prominence. They were means by which he might inspire confidence, hope and faith in those with whom he associated: "If any man can convince me and bring home to me that I do not think or act aright, gladly will I change; for I search after truth, by which man never yet was harmed." These were the words of Marcus Aurelius and they might well have been said by the man we honor today. Perhaps he had read them and took them as his guide. From constant reading of good books, among other cultural pursuits, one's life is both consciously and unconsciously shaped.

To understand a man it is necessary to know many of his activities and interests which will at least open avenues to his philosophy of life, his love of intellectual adventure and zest for living. It may be an unusual procedure to make a study of Dr. Bizzell's book reviews but it is extremely revealing. His reviews show a wide interest in books, the versatility of his mind, and appreciation of the efforts of the authors.

Biographical studies constituted a field of interest. One month Dr. Bizzell wrote reviews of four books, three of them dealing with the lives of great men—Gandhi, Daniel Webster, and Admiral Sims. The fourth was a review of Man and Society in Calamity, a book describing man's place in great crises such as the recent war.

Many times Dr. Bizzell wrote letters of appreciation to the authors of the books he reviewed. Occasionally he received replies. It was not for these replies that he wrote but out of a deep feeling for fellow authors who like himself loved books. On one occasion an author replied: "I am grateful to you, not merely for your very generous criticism of my book but especially for your kind letter. I do indeed appreciate your writing me. That is the human touch that most reviewers never trouble about, and I wish to assure you that it means a great deal to me." Dr. Bizzell's reviews are evidence of wide acquaintance with the literature expressive of man's emotions and aspirations, and the plain facts of life.

His love of books took him into many areas of writing and study. It is small wonder that a great library is one of his contributions to the University of Oklahoma. Thousands of students have profited
from his own love of books. Thousands, many thousands, in years
to come will read here, and bless the memory of the man whose statue
faces this center of culture.

Dr. Bizzell has left in his own scholarly productions significant
statements of his belief in the power of education. From accumulation
of facts, and the desire to place on paper his own mature thoughts,
he wrote many books, pamphlets, essays and addresses. In the essay
"Higher Education in the Southwest" (Higher Education in Society,
1936, p. 20) he wrote: "As long as we believe that knowledge is better
than ignorance, every effort should be made to give the youth of the
land a chance to bring to fruition all the powers that they possess.
To proceed on any other basis would be to turn the hands of the
clock of progress backward and endanger the future leadership of
the nation." His keen insight to the needs of the future has doubt-
less never been better phrased than in the above statement. His
emphasis upon knowledge, not mere information, points the way for
the good teacher and the good administrator.

Since it is through good books that the wisdom, knowledge and
learning of one generation are passed to another, it was obvious that
a press should be part of the facilities of the University. In 1928
under the direction of Dr. Bizzell the University of Oklahoma Press
was established to provide an opportunity for creative writers prim-
arily engaged in the academic pursuits to place before readers the
benefits of their labor. Two hundred separate publications, repre-
senting a total of one million volumes, have been published. Signifi-
cant contributions have been made to science, humanities, social
sciences, art and other areas of study. The University of Oklahoma
is universally known through its Press to men who are eager to read
books that have passed the test of critical readers, a capable editorial
staff and the good name of the University itself.

(a) Publications by William Bennett Bizzell:
Sons, 1914.
The Social Teachings of the Jewish Prophets. Boston, Sherman, French & Co.,
1916.
Company, 1926.

(b) Written in collaboration:
With Duncan, M. H. Present Day Tendencies in Education. Chicago and New
With Splawn, Water M. W. Introduction to the Study of Economics. Boston and
With Klein, A. J. and Withers, J. W. Survey of State-Supported Institutions of
1931.
With others. Higher Education and Society: A Symposium. Norman, University
Scholars who have had their first books published here continue to offer the Press the results of their studies and research. As the intellectual world has profited by the publishing arm of the University during the past score of years the future, too, will be made richer with books. Dr. Bizzell looked upon the Press and its refined product as another one of his contributions to Oklahoma, the Southwest and the nation. Doubtless it is one of the most important and will continue to be so recognized by those who love learning and beautiful books.

Dr. Bizzell studiously collected a personal library which contains approximately 9,000 volumes. Many were autographed and presented to him by admiring and appreciative authors who were his friends. This library covers broad fields of learning. The humanities, the arts, and the sciences are represented. The hundreds of volumes stand today as evidence of the intense and expansive interests that characterized him as a scholar, a Christian gentleman, a noble soul and a friend of men and women both young and old.

Wide publicity has been given his Bible collection which undoubtedly is one of the best and most extensive to be found among all private collections. It was much more than the love of collecting books that led him to surround himself with Bibles.

Like most lovers of books who have collected them he identified his personal copies with a book plate which is a quotation from Shakespeare,

"... Ignorance is the curse of God,
Knowledge the wing wherewith we fly to heaven."

While giving almost the whole of his adult professional life to the heavy responsibilities connected with students of a large university, which was constantly expanding, he had time to become a leader of leaders, a contributor to the enrichment of the lives of young men and women and the lives of all those with whom he associated. Dr. Bizzell through his accomplishments was a resourceful and radiant personality. The world in which he lived was bounded by horizons far beyond the vision of the average man. His interests were deep, abiding and universal.