THE SPIRIT OF LEARNING IN A MOTOR AGE

High Points in President Bizzell's Annual Address

October, 1929

That there is no "royal road to learning" was the admonition of President William Bennett Bizzell in his annual address delivered at the Fieldhouse on September 17. Doctor Bizzell deplored the noise and confusion of our mechanistic age and declared that they are the greatest handicaps to scholasticism today. A digest of President Bizzell's address follows:

"Making one community out of all races and all nations but, at the same time, they are preemptsing the sacred precincts of learning of the quietude so essential to uninterrupted thought and meditation. One wonders what effect the enormous advance in mechanical invention with the changing habits produced by these inventions will have upon the spirit of learning. There are those today who contend that civilization will be destroyed by the very agencies that have determined its progress. These pessimists have expressed the belief that increased leisure made possible by machine production is resulting in habits that are undermining health and physical vigor. We know that security to life has greatly declined as the use of motor driven machinery has increased. We read in the daily newspapers of so many people being killed in motor accidents that we have almost ceased to be interested in these tragic occurrences. The automobile has certainly increased the insecurity of property and, as far as I am able to see, this will be further increased as commercial aviation develops. It seems that man's mechanical ingenuity has surpassed his social discernment. He is threatening the stability of the social institutions that he has created by the mechanical contrivances he has developed for his convenience.

"The fact that people can no longer hear either solitude or remaining in one place is detrimental to those mental habits that are essential to intellectual accomplishment. It is quite obvious that few students today in any part of the world are permitted to pursue their studies under the most favorable conditions. As a general thing, our educational institutions are located in the midst of a feverish environment. The University of Oklahoma is more favorably situated than many educational institutions. I think it is exceedingly fortunate that this university is not located in a large city."

"The task ahead of all of us interested in the promotion of real scholarship is to create an atmosphere around our educational institutions that will make the acquisition of knowledge relatively easy. We see evidence of high tension here as well as elsewhere. Students rush from class to class."

"The emotional strain has profoundly influenced the literature of today. This is the day of outlines. We have outlines of literature, of art, of science, of philosophy, of religion, et cetera. The popularity of these outlines reflects the predominant characteristic of the age. We get satisfaction out of having a conversational knowledge of the literature of the past. These condensed outlines enable us to do this without the necessity of reading the voluminous volumes on which they are based."

"This in itself may not be a misfortune. The thing to be regretted is that the mental distractions of today have left us without an inclination to read the masterpieces of the literature of the past. Plato's Republic, Bacon's Novum Organum, Kant's Critique of Pure Reason, Hegel's Philosophy of History, Carl Pierson's Grammar of Science, Darwin's Origin of Species, and Spencer's First Principles are conspicuous sign posts on the intellectual highway of the centuries. But few people ever read these books today or even realize that they are sources of the intellectualism of the present time. Probably, not one of these authors, if he were living today, would have been able to produce the work on which his title to fame now rests."

"The conditions for clear thinking are not favorable. The mind is peopled with too many obsessions. The spirit of learning implies the opportunity, as well as the power, to concentrate on the single object that engages one's attention. This means that the mind must be able to select the ideas to which it will attend at the moment and completely eliminate all images and impressions foreign to the object of thought."

"Every individual is constantly making choices. We not only choose to go to college or to stay at home, but we choose between the vocation of banking or the profession of law or medicine. No one individual can be an athlete, a social lion, the best dressed man on the campus, a member of the glee club, a leader in debate, a student politician and a scholar at the same time. Every one who enters college must make choices between these conflicting interests. Upon the relative merits of these choices will depend one's happiness and success as a college student."

"But, you stand today confronted with the problem of making numerous decisions. Some of these decisions will affect your character, others will affect your intellectual life. Some of these decisions will not be easy for you to make but they must be made and no one can make them for you. I remind you that there is no royal road to learning. Character and wisdom come high but they are worth the price you must pay in terms of long hours of labor and sacrifice to possess them."

"Names of Sooners are to be observed in the faculty roster of eastern and southern colleges more and more. Mattie MacAddison, '18 Kingfisher (M. S. '29 Oklahoma), began this semester her position as assistant registrar of Winthrop college, Rock Hill, South Carolina."

27