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Reginald H. Sturtevant

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## 296 Colby Library Quarterly

### DR. BIXLER AS PRESIDENT

By REGINALD H. STURTEVANT

THE college presidency places upon a man demands for leadership that are tremendous, but the actual power of command which he can exercise, whether over faculty, student body, or public, is really very limited. Thus it becomes one of the severest tests of ability, personality and character. When, in 1942, Dr. Bixler was chosen for this position, the then Board Chairman, Neil Leonard, suddenly struck with the pressures into which they were about to thrust this sensitive scholar from Harvard Divinity School, exclaimed, "I hope we haven't made a mistake." The next eighteen years would demonstrate how groundless was his momentary fear.

It was quite natural that Dr. Bixler should enjoy the best of relations with his faculty. A scholar of wide renown, a teacher himself who saw problems from their point of view, he was convinced that a college, in essence, is its faculty; so his primary concern was always for measures which would enlarge and improve that body, and would make for an academic climate attractive to the best men available. His own wide acquaintance in the academic world was of great help in this respect. He was successful, among other things, in doubling the number of the faculty, in more than doubling the salary scale, in establishing departments of art and music, and in developing a personal loyalty that did much to attract good teachers and to hold them. Unquestionably, he was a "professor's president."

Less a matter of course, and, hence, even more gratifying, was the response Dr. Bixler evoked from the general public. He did much to bring the college and the world about it into closer relationship, through evening courses for adults, a town and gown orchestra, televised courses, public lectures, concerts and exhibits at the college. He placed the campus on year-around use by sponsoring summer schools, institutes and conferences of many kinds. Of his own time he was prodigal in speaking engagements, and in civic or charitable duties.

The real secret of his success, however, was his own personality. Wherever he rose to speak, people were charmed by his unaffected sincerity, pleased by his delightful humor, impressed

Colby Library Quarterly 297

by his intellect, and inspired by his enthusiasm. The best measure of the public's opinion of him is in what they have done for him. He came to a Colby of 650 students, having only three buildings and five shells on its new campus; he leaves it with thirty beautiful Georgian buildings, one of the finest college plants in the country, a doubled endowment, and an enrollment of 1100.

His hardest test lay with the student body in which he had to combat apathy and stimulate intellectual activity and interest. To accomplish this he tried a number of ingenious and effective ideas: the Creative Thinking Course, the Book of the Year, the Senior Scholars program of independent study; and he brought to Colby a continuous procession of outstanding authorities in various fields as visiting professors, lecturers or convocation speakers.

That he made progress is evidenced by the constant rise in academic standards, and by his own words, "They are appealed to by the truly worthwhile. There is this marvelous rising to quality. People around here now are responding to ideas."

Two things of great importance he brought to the student body—a new and dynamic concept of intellectual values and a genuine and sympathetic concern for the individual. To quote directly from the students, it was the "warmth, understanding, humor and humility" of one of the world's greatest scholars which impressed them most. It might well be said of him as James Russell Lowell said of Louis Agassiz, "His magic was not far to seek,—he was so human."

The real test of one's sense of humor is whether he can laugh at himself. This Bixler could do with great glee. Of the many jokes about his extraordinary height, he especially liked to quote the saying of his Harvard colleagues, "We don't want Bixler any longer—he is long enough."

Nevertheless, as the tall, sandy-haired, enthusiastic and lovable scholar goes striding down the corridors of history, his stature is bound to increase as future generations come to recognize and appraise the quality that was in Bixler, to which the college rose, for he is the very embodiment of those words of Joseph Addison's: "'Tis not in mortals to command success; we will do more—deserve it."