

**E**VERY YEAR is a presidential year in American higher education. Statisticians have estimated that the average tenure of office for the college or university president in the United States is four years. Whatever significance this may have for the student of government, it is a sobering fact to those who are directly concerned with the improvement, or even the bare survival, of any of the 1,800 institutions that presume to qualify as colleges and universities. Educational historians

remind us that the rate of turnover has always been notoriously high, that the bearded prexies of the nineteenth-century campus only look as if they reigned forever. I do not know how rapidly, if at all, the rate has been accelerating during the unsettling years since World War II. But obviously the arks of culture are going to have a hard enough time surviving the student inundation of the coming decade without continually changing Noahs in mid-flood. The current turnover is alarming enough.

W. W. Watt

## THE COLLEGE PRESIDENT

The alarms have resulted recently in a number of excursions into the difficult field of presidential analysis. Ex-President Harold Dodds of Princeton has been given a Carnegie grant for a comprehensive survey of the college presidency. Last year Scribner's published *A Friend in Power*, a novel in which Professor Carlos Baker of Princeton artfully depicts the delicate process of winnowing sturdy presidential timber from saplings that will not survive storm and blight. This

year Harper has brought out *The American College President* in which Harold W. Stoke—now in his third college presidency as the head of Queens—gives his experienced views of what it takes.

Dr. Stoke's book gives the reader the stimulating but frustrating experience of sitting vicariously on the edge of an academic chair that has degenerated into a hot seat. Without lamenting his lot or tooting his own horn, the author manages, with a remarkable mixture of tact and candor, to show that the most competent incumbent can only try to make the best of the hardest of all possible jobs. The ideal college president, one infers, must have the strength of Atlas, the wisdom of Solomon, the patience of J. B., the eyes of Argus, and the touch of Midas—and even with all these attributes, too many of his faculty will see him only as Janus. After weaving his way through the maze of exacting qualifications, the reader might be forgiven for echoing the comment of Dr. Norman Macy, the eminent surgeon on the Board of Trustees of the university "founded" by Carlos Baker: "The only man who could possibly qualify on all those counts died on the Cross nineteen hundred years ago."

It is doubtful if a more convincing picture of the college president's many-ringed circus will appear soon, and it would be presumptuous for anyone looking from the outside in—or from the underside up—to question its general accuracy. Instead, I propose to discuss some of the implications of one issue that dominates all others. Dr. Stoke raises it in the first chapter:

If I were to make a general observation about the qualifications of college presidents, it would be this: in recent years the factor of educational distinction has declined while factors of personality, management skills, and successful experience in business and administration have increased in importance. This fact reflects the gradual transformation of the college president from an intellectual leader into a manager, skilled in administration, a broker in personal and public relations.

The further he goes in the book, the more Dr. Stoke reveals his reluctance to accept this change. When he has put behind him a lively description of the headaches of house-keeping, he comes out strongly for a president with a mes-

sianic faith in education and ideas about making it prevail. But I was left with the unpleasant impression that, unless the trend is sharply reversed, such a paragon will become rarer as the mechanized years tick by. For a while there will be a president here and there who can occasionally find a pause for the day's meditation that is known as the scholar's hour. But the day is not far off, I assume, when private visions will be entirely replaced by public relations, when the meditator will yield to the mediator, when—as the jacket blurb promises us—the “Man of Learning” will give way to the “Man of Management.”

Lest we become unduly alarmed, it must be admitted that any two-valued orientation distorts the picture. The goals of Learning and Management are not so far apart today as the traditional stereotypes of Ivory Tower and Market Place still mislead people into assuming. The two worlds have been of immense value to each other. Moreover, the “gradual transformation” discussed by Dr. Stoke has been going on for a long time. Ernest Earnest, in his readable history of the American college (*Academic Procession*, Bobbs-Merrill, 1953), reminds us that even the patriarchal

presidents of the nineteenth century were not isolated from the hard facts of meeting payrolls: “President Arthur Twining Hadley of Yale said that when he called on President Noah Porter (1871-1876) he usually found him reading Kant; when he called on President Timothy Dwight (1886-1899) he found him reading a balance sheet.” Earnest traces a growing division, beginning about the turn of the century, between the scholarly ideals of the faculty and the pecuniary preoccupations of the administrators. By 1930 the alarm bell had been sounded loud and often.

But we can't solve our problems with the consolations of history or by giving in, however reluctantly, to what we presume to be inevitable. The time has certainly come when we must assert the predominance of some values over others. One rule should be deeply engraved on the collective conscience of the campus: *Whatever else he is, the man (or woman) chosen to head a college or university should be an educational leader; and whatever his other cares may be, he should continue as long as he remains in office to give top priority to the duties of educational* (Continued on page 77)

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leadership.

I do not, of course, mean an educationist: the professional student of education who exalts methods above content, talks about life-adjustment to a life he has not studied in depth, and speaks and reads a strange language called Pedagogy that is unintelligible to the average layman. Nor do I go along with the loose usage referring to every teacher, at least from the thirteenth grade up, as an educator. The campuses are full of specialists, many of them productive scholars, who have neither the inclination nor the capacity to take a wide-angle view of the curriculum. By an educational leader I mean an excellent teacher with enough classroom experience on the undergraduate level to give him a first-hand insight into the problems of the professor; a man, moreover, who has evolved a firm but flexible philosophy of education and can express it articulately to both scholar and layman. Graduate teaching is not essential, but the acceptable candidate should present evidence of genuine understanding of the work of the research scholar, preferably in the form of solid publication. If he has also had experience in educational

administration—as dean, department head, or director of a significant program of studies—so much the better. The goodly company of deans who have been kicked upstairs to become distinguished presidents takes some of the edge off the quip that a dean is a mouse in training to be a rat. But it must not be forgotten that many a dean is an unsuccessful teacher who has blossomed into new dignity through some special talent as a disciplinarian, a clerk, or an errand boy.

The reasons for insisting on an educational leader are in such plain sight that they are often, like Poe's purloined letter, completely overlooked. Every reputable institution of higher learning, at least beyond the junior college level, is established for two interrelated purposes: to export knowledge through teaching and expand it through scholarship and research.

The teachers and scholars on the campus are more directly and consistently concerned with pursuing these aims than any other group. Neither fraternities nor football, nor luxurious dormitories nor palatial union buildings, nor the touching of

alumni, nor the sweet uses of publicity can so enhance the long-term reputation of a college as a live faculty that insists on high standards and gives full value in classroom, library and laboratory.

To help in building and maintaining such a faculty, the president must thoroughly understand the facts of academic life. For example:

Conscientious teaching is one of the most demanding of all occupations; the kind of thinking that goes into it cannot be obtained merely by putting a slogan on the wall.

Considering demands of "keeping up with the field," class preparation, paper grading, committee work and student counseling (both scheduled) — the college teacher with a twelve-hour class contact load may be doing a fair day's (and night's) work; but no time-study man can find a perfect formula for measuring his input and output.

Significant research requires solid blocks of uninterrupted time, the sort that can be supplied only by free summers and occasional leaves; research cannot always promise or achieve "results," and much of it is not "practical" — at least in the fuzzily restricted use of such terms in the market place.

Criticism is not the cor-

rosive griping of the man who will not "play with the team" but the constant self-inspection without which no educational institution can progress.

Academic freedom is not a subversive shibboleth of the American Association of University Professors but an atmosphere without which the honest pursuit of the truth is impossible.

The instructor on the lowest rung of the academic ladder is not the president's employee, but his fellow scholar and teacher; the instructor has a clear right to reason why and to express his reactions to the president's policies and practices openly, not in the safe confines of a company suggestion box.

No workable educational policy can spring fully armed from the head of the institutions and be passed down through channels by executive fiat; it must be hammered out in the give-and-take of free discussion.

In short, the qualifications of the ideal president consist not only of aptitudes, but of attitudes. In every first-rate college educator the attitudes are so built-in that he cannot choose but remain a friend of the faculty if he becomes a friend in power. By this I do not mean a president

whose entire energies are devoted to appeasing the teaching staff; I mean a college educator who unmistakably puts teaching and scholarship first in importance.

In his final chapter, Dr. Stoke argues convincingly that the college president must have a philosophy of education and discusses its uses in some detail. Certainly the possession of a sound philosophy will enable the busiest housekeeper to find reasonable solutions to many of the educational dilemmas of the campus. But I am still left with the impression that, beyond this, the modern president can function as an educator only in occasional lulls between the battles of bureaucracy:

All this is particularly galling to a man who has always thought of himself as primarily concerned with education and who thought that by becoming a president he would be even more influential. He can still make noises like an educator — after all, the president can create captive audiences but for reasons which will be seen to be fundamentally sound, he had better resign himself to a prepared fate.

I cannot believe that any

true educational leader, including Dr. Stoke, will resign himself to such a fate. He will continue to preach his gospel — by speaking on carefully selected occasions, by writing of every sort from patient letters for impatient alumni to books as informative as *The American College President* (a superior form of noise-making).

An educational leader who is not a clear and convincing speaker and writer is a contradiction in terms. The busiest president must not be too busy to think his way through to a broad picture of the institution he wants to shape — what the late Chancellor Capen of Buffalo once called "the grand plan" — and he must present it in the clearest possible focus to the members of the "college family." He must also, of course — especially in his special role as middleman between trustees and faculty — reflect as accurately as possible the views of others. But he must never dodge his duty as a creator by pretending that he is only a reflector.

Nor must he limit himself to leadership within his own college family. Now that, thanks largely to Russian science, education has become a national emergency, the country is crying for educa-

tional leadership. This must come from the clear voices of those most able to make themselves heard above the cacophony of all the self-appointed experts who have been sputtering since the first sputnik. An occasional college professor or an retired admiral—an Arthur Bestor or a Hyman Rickover—may still get a wide hearing. But the college president, even the ex-president, is in a better position to make the front pages: he remains in Dixon Wecter's phrase, "one of the few oracles still held in considerable popular respect by our irreverent civilization." This is one of the strongest arguments against the common proposal that the president should be a business executive and the dean an educator; the newspaper seldom listens to deans, the American public has an awesome interest in the number-one boy.

The president's role as a propagandist must not be confused with the routine brochures and handouts of public relations. It is even further removed from that of a large number of advertising men in industry: their job is often to persuade the consumer that he desperately wants what he obviously doesn't need (a new car every year—lower, wider, finnier and more ex-

pensive); his duty is always to persuade the American people that they desperately need what most of them really don't want (and the total cost of a year at the best colleges is still lower than that of a middle-priced car). For the American people in general don't want higher education. They want training, or skills, or "more science" for embryonic rocketeers, or short cuts to literacy, or degrees, or higher paying first jobs, or four happy years as pre-weds, or fraternities and sororities, or the best seats in the alumni cheering section, or the status of the old school tie—but, as Ruskin said back in 1867, there is still "little desire for the thing itself."

Of course, the educational leader should also be an efficient (but not officious) manager, a skilled diplomatic fencer (but not a fence-sitter), an organizer (but not an "organization man"). He should be a money-getter without succumbing to chronic mendicancy. He should possess all the ethical virtues of the Boy Scout list from trustworthiness to reverence. He should also have a charming life who is not only above suspicion, but skilled in human relations beyond the fondest dreams of Cal-

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purnia. But above all, he must be an educational leader. If he cannot, because of his other responsibilities, something's got to give. The solution of "a Damon-and-Pythias relationship to some trusted provost, dean of faculty, or assistant" is, according to Dr. Stoke, "rare and fortuitous." He insists that "the real solution of the problem must wait upon more fundamental institutional evolution." But can we afford to wait that long? Will Dr. Dodd's study point to a quicker way out? The college president cannot, like Pooh-bah, continue to function much longer as Lord High Everything Else. There were no H-bombs in Titipu.

## INDIAN WORDS . . .

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mangus) and the cheetah (from the Hindi *chita*).

A vast army of English words has also been admitted into the Indian languages. Spoken Telegu, for instance, is estimated to contain no less than 3,000. This enrichment of vocabulary and literature has, therefore, been a two-way traffic.

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## ELECTRONIC . . .

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successful until then to make so much money in other fields of its activity that the citizen will be able to mail his correspondence, which will be electronically sorted, for a postage of still no more than twenty pfennigs.

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*"They tell me Boobleigh has a childlike faith in his wife."*

*"Yes, it's wonderful. Why, he even goes so far as to take her word for it when she says there is plenty of gas in their car." — Judge.*

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*Husband (to wife, over phone): Good news, dear. I'm pretty well played out, tramping all over town, but I've found an apartment at last.*

*Wife (ecstatically): Oh, Horace, you darling! Do hurry home and tell me all about it.*

*"There's no great hurry. We don't move in until 1982. The present tenants have a two years' lease." — Life.*