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Dr. Tight—The President and Man

By C. E. Hodgin*

In 1901, Dr. William G. Tight was called by the regents of the University of New Mexico to become president of the institution. The preceding president, Dr. C. L. Herrick, upon his resignation, recommended as his successor, Dr. Tight, with whom he had been associated at Denison University, Granville, Ohio. At that institution, Dr. Tight had received his early college education. He did later work at Harvard, and earned the Ph.D. degree at Chicago University.

He specialized in biology and geology, with greater interest in geology. In fact, it was the rich field of geology which particularly attracted him to New Mexico. But when he arrived, took charge of the University, and became acquainted with its immediate, pressing needs, he slackened his geological activity, and intensified his interest in the University, throwing his supreme effort into its development.

One of the first things that gripped his attention, was the improvement of the environment. He knew that a barren campus on the desert would never attract young people.

With little or no appropriation for campus work, and his own salary but $2,000.00 a year, he, nevertheless, started action. Water from the city reservoir was very expensive, and in the effort for cheaper irrigation service, a deep well was dug and a high wind mill put up for motive power.

Trees and vines and flowers were to be planted. Only a few scattering ones then existed on the campus. A plan for setting trees was made, practically as we see it today, and Arbor Days were most effectively utilized. The day before this holiday, boys with wagons and horses were sent

*An address delivered by Dr. Hodgin at Memorial Day exercises, February 28, 1931.
out to the mountains or in the valley for trees. Other boys dug holes, and prepared for the trees, under direction and help of the president. On Arbor Day morning the trees were carefully set. At noon, although we had no Home Economics department then, the University girls had ready a most inviting dinner, and a joyous occasion it was.

In the afternoon the annual baseball game between the regular team and a faculty team was played in the presence of the students and townspeople. President Tight himself was a splendid athlete and a star baseball player, so with a few good players from the faculty, and perhaps a lawyer or two added from the town, this event was usually exciting and well attended.

A beginning was made to place on the campus all kinds of vegetation found in New Mexico, as an instructive feature and for practical use of Botany classes. As an illustration there still stands the tall group of yuccas brought from the extreme southwest of the then territory, and brought at considerable trouble. They still give us, in season, their beautiful white blossoms.

The magnificent evergreen grove on the west, which we enjoy today, was set under most discouraging circumstances—stone covered hillsides, apparently poor soil, expensive irrigation, and the expression by most people that those pine trees would never grow. Dr. Tight's plan called for a beautiful fountain, a little later, in this pine grove.

Clinging woodbines were brought from Lincoln Park, Chicago.

The swimming pool, which still brings considerable pleasure to students, was built as a combination with an irrigation reservoir.

An arbotheater was made between the power house and the estufa, in a natural depression which lent itself to an outdoor meeting place. Many assemblies were held there. Several trees are left, but the bowl between the stage on the west and the terraced seating on the east has been filled up.
An outdoor gymnasium was erected northward from the swimming pool and was much used until taken down. Each year the graduating class was invited by the President to leave a class memorial which would enhance the attractiveness of the campus, so we have the little fountain and fish pond, the vertical sundial in the rockery, the concrete seats, etc. But the old rustic pump with the water trough, gave way to progress.

Wherever President Tight went he seemed to be thinking of things that would add to the interest of the University. One summer while visiting a park in Ohio, he secured a number of tame squirrels, brought them to the campus here, made boxes for them in the trees, and hoped they would become a permanent feature of life and beauty on the campus; but the squirrels were not kindly treated by all, and in time ran away, much to the President's disappointment.

An experiment in irrigation was made. It was realized that there was much waste by evaporation from surface irrigation, and that in jointed pipe lines under ground the fine roots of trees worked in and clogged the full flow of water. Inverted wooden troughs were found to be unobstructive to the water flow, and then concrete troughs for longer wear were made and placed open side down, with success.

Quite a pretentious museum had been started with well planned cases, drawers, shelves, etc., but everything was lost in the fire of Hadley Hall in 1910. At that time there was also a deeply regrettable loss in the destruction of Dr. Tight's New Mexico field papers, sketches, and writings. Another phase of development to which President Tight's attention was early turned was the strengthening of the curriculum. Being a scientist, it was not surprising that his immediate interest should turn toward science courses, though he was not narrow, and tried to bring all courses up, as well as appropriations made possible.
He established quite a complete music school for the University in the city. The third story of the old Academy building, later the public library, on the present city library corner, was rented. There was a large assembly hall in addition to several rooms, and some work was done in roughly finished rooms in the basement. A faculty was placed in charge for vocal training, piano, violin, public reading and musical kindergarten. Dr. Tight's plan was to place music free in the University, the same as English, mathematics, and science. His large interest in music was rather surprising to some of us who were familiar with his own lack of ability in the art, which he freely admitted, saying that he could not carry a tune, nor tell one tune from another. Yet he enjoyed music, and thoroughly believed in its elevating power and refining influence in the development of character. He compiled and had published the "U. N. M. Song Book," which was used on college occasions. The music school was a success, and many Albuquerque citizens can recall the splendid recitals and entertainments frequently given in the Music Hall. But it seemed impossible, financially, to bridge it over until adequate appropriations could be secured.

President Tight was much interested in adding astronomy to the curriculum, and sought money for an observatory. In fact, he had chosen a site on the highest point of the mountains to the east, and roughly surveyed a road to the place. John D. Rockefeller had made a small loan to Mr. Tight in his early educational career, so Mr. Rockefeller was appealed to again, this time for a gift of sufficient proportion to construct an adequate observatory with proper equipment; but he failed to respond.

One more special line of endeavor aroused Dr. Tight's interest. He had not been here long until he began to give thought to future building plans, in an effort to establish some kind of unity in construction, as only a "hit and miss" style was being followed. It soon dawned upon him that
there was a possibility of using an Indian type of architecture, which might be unique, attractive and distinctly appropriate to the environment. His thought was absorbed with the prospect of breaking away from the common, and striking the unusual, a new-old style which would make the University of New Mexico absolutely distinctive in college architecture, the world over. With much enthusiasm, at least as shown to intimate friends, he began to study Indian construction as he had occasion to go from place to place over the territory. Many were the photographs he took of Indian buildings until his room looked like a sort of picture gallery as he began to make a careful study of lines and walls and windows and roofs. At last, in connection with Architect Cristy, of Albuquerque, after deciding on the Pueblo type of architecture, he sought to combine the important features of the Pueblo expression and to record the same in blue print.

With the consent of the regents he began by building the power house in the chosen construction, and then the estufa of the fraternity—Pi Kappa Alpha.

The next step was to build the boys' dormitory, which was named "Quataka," or "Man-Eagle," and the girls' dormitory, called "Hokona," or the "Virgin Butterfly," which names still appear over the entrance doors. The symbols in circular form, which are seen on each building, Dr. Tight himself painted, assisted by Miss Ethel Hickey, a member of the faculty and a sister of Judge Hickey. These conventional figures show the Indian eagle on "Quataka," and the butterfly forms on "Hokona." It is interesting to note how the different colors of paint have been preserved.

The next Pueblo building and the last of Dr. Tight's work, was the remodeling of the administration building, in 1908. It was a large, three story, plain, red brick structure, with basement, and top-heavy roof. With this change there was added Rodey Hall, in which we are now assembled. It is a replica of an Indian church, and you will notice the room
is built in the form of a cross. It was named Rodey Hall in honor of the late Judge B. S. Rodey, the founder of the University.

The next building to have been constructed was a library. Plans were drawn according to the latest ideas of library service at that time, money was secured, and the site selected. It was to have been ellipsoid in form and placed across the north end of the avenue just above the present dining hall. But a new president came in, changed the plans and used the money in the construction of the science hall, with the elevated roof. This was intended as an entering wedge to break away from the Pueblo architecture.

Most people approved Indian architecture, especially tourists and those from the outside. A few Albuquerque citizens were strongly opposed to this type of construction. One man said to me one day: "How foolish to go back 300 years for a type of building—not much evidence of progress in that." I said: "What about going back two or three thousand years to copy Greek architecture?" "Well," he said, "if you are going to be consistent, the president and faculty should wear Indian blankets around their shoulders, and feathered coverings on their heads!" But in spite of opposition the idea went forward, and seems today to be established.

When the great change in the large administration building was affected, the group of buildings began to make a very striking appearance. At this time an exceedingly attractive illustrated article appeared in the World's Work, which gave wide publicity and called attention to the University of New Mexico. This article was written by E. Dana Johnson, of the Santa Fe New Mexican.

I was, one evening, in the office after class hours, when a gentleman and lady drove up, came to the office, asked the privilege of looking through the buildings, announcing that they had seen an article in the World's Work while in New York, that they were on the way to California and stopped
over in Albuquerque for no other reason than to see the University buildings. After I had shown them around, they expressed themselves as delighted with the uniqueness and beauty of the buildings, and their appropriateness to the environment.

Dr. Tight was deeply interested in the building program, and watched very closely every detail of the construction, as the following incident will show.

While the dormitories were being built, it was necessary for him to be away for some time. Upon his return, his first thought was to see the new buildings, so I took him on a personally conducted tour. As we approached Hokona, the girls' dormitory, his eye promptly caught sight of an arch over the front entrance. Immediately he said, "How does that come? There are no curved lines in this architecture. That must come out at once"; and it did come out.

Dr. Tight had a rich experience in the summer of 1903 when he was chosen as general scientist, for observations from geology to astronomy in the expedition, headed by Miss Annie Peck, the famous mountain climber, to South America. She was out this time to climb Mount Sarata. When the party was ready to return home, they were caught by a quarantine which lasted almost two months. Those were anxious weeks for us at the University, as they ran far beyond vacation. At last I received a cablegram from Arica, Chile, saying "Homeward." That one word cost the scientist $8.40. The expense encouraged brevity. A cordial reception was given the president when he got back to the University.

Dr. Tight's keen interest in the building program and other matters kept up, so that only a comparatively small time was given to geology, although he tramped over the mountains, mesas, and hills a great deal. Having to curtail his geological activity in New Mexico was a real sacrifice to him but he expected to make up for the loss in a sabbatical year's leave of absence promised him, when he
was to study the entire scope of New Mexico geology. For this work he was planning a special wagon which would afford him a home, a desk, and conveniences for his geological records, as he devoted himself to this extensive and intensive work. But, the year did not come to him.

In conclusion, let me say a few words about Dr. Tight, the man. He and I were not only bound closely together in the work of this University, but we were very close personal friends. In giving my estimate of him, however, I would not have you think that I looked upon him as one without faults. He certainly had his human frailties as all of us have, but it is my purpose at this time to point out some of those qualities of character which served him so well in his effort to advance this institution.

Physically, nature had well endowed him. He was tall, broad shouldered, robust and wholesome looking. For many years he wore a full beard, well trimmed, which gave him rather a distinctive appearance. He was genial, approachable, and enthusiastic. He was accommodating and loyal to friends and held as little lasting resentment to enemies as is usually found in a well-balanced man. He was brimful of the spirit and joy of youth, tending generally to inspire confidence and action from faculty and students, such as is characteristic of a leader. He was a genius to do things—was a practical plumber, a carpenter, a painter, and he did not hesitate to don his overalls and use his mechanical ingenuity to help in any emergency that might arise.

This recalls an amusing little incident one day at my home, where he did considerable experimenting in underground irrigation, raising vegetation. On this occasion he had his rough clothes on and was spading the soil, when a nicely dressed lady drove up and asked if Dr. Tight lived there. He answered that he did and that he would go and call him. So he went in the house, hastily changed his apparel and returned to receive the waiting lady, introducing himself to her.
The president was broad and liberal in his ideas, which both made and lost him friends. He was a member of the Baptist Church, but was often misunderstood in his religious conception.

Dr. Tight was active and aggressive in the work of education. He was a live member of the New Mexico Educational Association, and was prominent in local and national educational councils.

He was a man of strong personality, and consistent persistency. Let me give an illustration or two. In 1906, when he was attending the New York meeting of the Geological Society of America, he had a plan to invite and secure that national organization to hold its next meeting in the small town of Albuquerque; New Mexico. On account of the remoteness of the place from the East, very few of the members at first seemed to prefer it. But Dr. Tight presented his claims with so much interest and enthusiasm that his invitation was finally accepted, and the organization had a great meeting here the next year. The secretary of the society, in commenting on the meeting, wrote as follows:

"Dr. Tight worked hard for the success of the Albuquerque meeting, interesting everybody in town, and even securing concessions from the Santa Fe railroad that were far greater than the size of the gathering in itself would have warranted. He was everywhere at all times and did everything that anybody could for our comfort and profit. If direction was needed he was the director, and if a camp rustler was called for he cheerfully volunteered his services. His preparations in every respect were so complete that the society expressed itself in a formal vote of thanks at the concluding session. In connection with this meeting he organized a very instructive and enjoyable excursion to the Sandia Mountains, and another to the Grand Canyon of the Colorado." The secretary further adds, "Probably this meeting was one of the brightest occasions of his life."
When Dr. Tight first came to Albuquerque, at request of the former president, Dr. C. L. Herrick, he was to see me on arrival. His calls upon us were quite frequent, and he let it be known to us that he was concerned about getting a good place to live, and finally said he wanted to live with us. We told him more than once we were not taking anybody. But one day an expressman drove up to the house and delivered a trunk which he said Dr. Tight had sent, and a little later the owner of the trunk himself appeared on the scene, and again announced his desire to live with us. He stayed until he had permission to put his trunk in a room where he followed and then remained with us, in our home, for seven years.

He never ceased to show appreciation of this home, as he came and went, and his varied activities which were generally woven in some way about University interests. When he entered the house he would fill it like a breeze, always happiest when he had something favorable to report regarding the University.

Thus, throughout the years, his life went on, but one day there came a sudden change. In the morning mail, a letter was received from the regents of the University asking for his resignation. No opportunity was to be allowed him for answering any charges, or making any explanations. I shall never forget the expression that clouded his face as he read to me that fatal letter. To thus be torn away so suddenly, just in his prime, from his deepest life interest, with no chance for defense, quite broke his heart and his spirit, and doubtless a little later on, his health.

Dr. Tight was subject to occasional attacks of sick headache. These now grew more frequent and more severe until in a few months he was taken to the Glendale Sanitarium, California, where in a short time, due to an acute condition which terminated in blood poisoning, he passed away. At his own request his body was cremated, and the little urn of ashes sent back, through Albuquerque, to his Ohio home.