

# Charles Kellogg Burdick

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Charles Burdick's connection with Cornell University spanned more than fifty years. It began in 1887 when his father, Francis Marion Burdick, a professor in the original faculty of the Law School, brought his family to live on the Cornell campus. In 1891 the family moved to New York City and the elder Burdick began his long career at the Columbia Law School. Charles Burdick entered Princeton in 1900. There he studied jurisprudence under Woodrow Wilson, edited the *Daily Princetonian*, and was graduated in 1904. At the Columbia Law School his first year's standing won him, at the beginning of his second year, the honor of election to the board of editors of the *Columbia Law Review*. He received the LL.B. degree in 1908, after a delay of a year which he spent in the North Woods while recovering from an illness. He then began practice in New York City with the firm of the present Mr. Justice Stone of the United States Supreme Court. Thence he went into the teaching of law. Tulane University at New Orleans and the University of Missouri knew him briefly, and in 1914, at the age of 31, he came to Cornell as a professor of law. His success as a teacher and as a man and brother among students and colleagues was immediate. He became a standby of the School and so continued. In 1926 he succeeded George G. Bogert as dean; he resigned the deanship in 1936 but retained his professorship to the end.

Burdick's activities were manifold, not only as a teacher, as a writer, and as an administrator, but also as a participant in important affairs outside the scope of his regular duties. His classroom presence was courteous, his method urbane, and his tolerance so generous that it may occasionally have led him to suffer fools. His thorough culture and his wide knowledge of the law made his instruction outstanding. To his teaching, as to his writing, he brought an illuminated and well stored mind and a knack of clear thinking. Out of these qualities came lucid exposition of material, set forth in English that no hearer or reader had to labor to comprehend. In his teaching and in his writing he ranged widely. He edited new editions of his father's books on subjects which he himself did not regularly teach. He prepared works of his own on Public Service Companies and on Constitutional Law. His book on the latter topic has become a classic; West Point alone has absorbed some hundreds of copies a year; at the time of his death he was doing a new edition.

He taught through the Law School curriculum, but in the end he concentrated upon American Public Law and International Law. In recognition of his authority in the latter subject he was asked to serve as special counsel to President Roosevelt in a South American boundary dispute if it should be, as eventually it was not, referred to the

President. Burdick was, till his death, a consultant on the restatement of international law undertaken by the body called Harvard Research in International Law. While the late George W. Wickersham was its chairman, Burdick was Reporter for the subject of Extradition and his work has since been used by several countries in disputes involving that topic.

Burdick wrote and worked ardently in behalf of international peace. He was a profound believer in the League of Nations, and the state of the world just before his death re-aroused his compassion for humanity, for his outlook on life was characterized by a sympathy for the under dog. That compassionate disposition conditioned his legal thinking on domestic constitutional questions as well as on international problems. He was at heart a humanitarian.

When he became dean of the Law School he found the legal world in a ferment over standards of preliminary education for admission to law schools and of training for admission to the bar. The content of the law curriculum was also under discussion. Burdick's qualities soon disclosed themselves. He marshaled arguments which convinced all doubters that the Cornell Law School should be put on a level with the half-dozen or so in the country which then required a college degree for entrance. He enriched the curriculum. His Faculty increased from seven to twelve men. In his time also came Myron Taylor's gift for a law school building, and Burdick turned from law-books to blueprints and became an amateur architect. The great sunlit Reading Room and the acoustic perfection of the Moot Court Room are his monuments. To the deanship Burdick brought his urbane good sense, his serene temper. As a faculty chief he tolerated every opinion of every colleague. His was no one-man show. Harmonious teamwork among an independently thinking faculty continued year in and year out. Incidentally these same qualities, which so endeared him to his immediate colleagues, operated to the same result in the wider fields of university administration to which he was called from time to time. Sane and steady, tenacious but open-minded, he never slighted a problem, and the results of his thinking had a compelling reasonableness. In his relations with the students Dean Burdick occupied himself with their personal troubles as well as their scholastic difficulties. With affairs of the heart that went awry, family matters at home, or police entanglements in Ithaca, in physical and psychical ill health, students came to Burdick and he helped them with his time, his advice, and often with his money. Frequently he sensed their unhappiness and gave them unsought assistance.

Burdick's life, however, was far from being enclosed by the walls of our university. He taught, in their summer sessions, at other institutions—Chicago, Columbia, Stanford. He traveled abroad, and in other lands met the men of his profession, particularly the international lawyers. He knew Geneva well, and the League of Nations asked him to direct the Greek evacuation of Asia Minor, a task that he was unable to undertake. All Souls' College at

Oxford made him an associate member, a rare honor for an American, and gave him a seat at the high table. During the World War he was a director of one of the American Red Cross services. In the American Bar Association he made efforts to guide modern legislation into more effective form. His interest in social economics brought him in 1931, from the hand of Governor Roosevelt, an appointment to the New York State Commission to Investigate the Administration of Justice. Governor Lehman in 1934 made him a member of the State Judicial Council assigned to abridge legal procedure. Later in that year the same executive made him chairman of the New York State Law Revision Commission, whose task has been the elimination of outworn or outmoded state law, and he was still chairman at his death. He was a member of the American Bar Association's committee seeking the same ends in the national field and among the states. In 1936 he served as special counsel to Governor Lehman in an investigation of the charges brought against District Attorney Geoghan of Kings County by those who demanded Geoghan's removal. Burdick's public service in this last matter was arduous.

Charles Burdick thus had a full and well rounded life. Everywhere his intellectual gifts won him respect and his warm heart won him affection. Besides distinction of mind he had rare distinction of personality and of bearing. No shouter from the housetops, he was gentle in manner and quiet in voice; but his outward aspect gave little hint of his firm will and tenacious spirit. He was never overbearing to others, but others in their turn were not allowed to override him. He could not be made to abate from his ideals, and in any matter of principle he revealed the adamant core that lay within him. Those who knew him realize that a great light has gone out and agree that his most fitting epitaph is the phrase: "He was a scholar and a gentleman."