

# Professor STORIES

by *Burton Blatt, EdD*

## MR. RUSSELL

**M**r. Russell was a plain man. Of course, "plain" is not a substitute for "simple." Nor is it an antonym for "elegant," at least not in Mr. Russell's case. He took his BA in English at Albion College in 1937. From there, he went east to teach at one of those new progressive schools where Westchester matrons conspire with Teachers College, Columbia professors to make the country get its mind off the Depression. While at the Bolton School, he took a master's degree in English literature at Columbia's Graduate School; and then, he found an instructorship at Colgate.

All who met Mr. Russell knew that here was a gentleman, a man whose manners reflected his life more than his appearance to the world. Mr. Russell was a bookish man, who hardly ever let a day go by without a trip to the library to bring something back and take something else out, or just to check up on new excitements or old neglects.

It could never be said that Mr. Russell was a famous scholar. Indeed, he published very infrequently. But when he did, each paper was a nearly perfect piece of criticism, or expository prose, or biographical vignette. More than one of his close friends was to remark that Mr. Russell's reluctance to publish reflected the man's reverence for scholarship, so much so that he was intimidated by engagement in the act of presenting himself as a scholar. And more than one friend remarked that Mr. Russell worried about inflicting his unwor-

thy ideas on others.

As the years went by, the wars came and were over, students came and for the most part graduated, and women eventually came. But nothing really changed, especially Mr. Russell. To be sure, his hair turned white and the lines on his face increased, and he was eventually promoted to professor. But within the man, Mr. Russell was true to himself, and to the people and ideals he held priceless.

Mr. Russell died in his 65th year, no more than a few weeks before he was scheduled to retire from the university. There is little else to be said here. There is no wife or family to remark upon, no hobbies to discuss, no major work which must be mentioned each time the man's name is mentioned. Of course, there are hundreds of his former students everywhere who talk about the man from time to time, and think about him very often, and will continue to think about him until they too leave. And, of course, the university expressed its gratitude to Mr. Russell for leaving it all of his worldly effects by naming an annual lecture in his honor.

Mr. Russell would have been pleased with the good things which were said about him. But it didn't seem to much matter to hear such things during his life, and it probably would not have mattered very much if he could hear that talk now. Yet, he might have smiled a little had he been permitted to listen in on a friend's comment that, "Every moment Mr. Russell lived seemed to be a momentous occasion. And while his work seemed to be his life, his life was a splendid creation."