



C. C. Furnas

Clifford Cook Furnas

1900-1969

By Lawrence R. Hafstad

Clifford Cook Furnas, President Emeritus of the University of Buffalo, died on April 27, 1969, in Amsterdam. It is significant that certain adjectives are invariably used when one refers to scientists and technical people. One reads often of the brilliant scientist and of the competent or successful engineer. One reads often of a shrewd lawyer, of a wily politician, and so on, but the adjective *wise* is reserved for the wise old doctor, or farmer, or even the wise old woman. There is a weakness in our educational process that makes the word combination *wise scientist* a jarring anachronism. The reason for this obviously is that scientists who can be described as wise are so few and far between.

However, among the host of scientists who richly deserve the adjective *brilliant*, there are a very few who do qualify as wise. Pegram of Columbia University, Tate of the University of Minnesota, and Lauritsen of the California Institute of Technology come to mind in this category. It is to this select group that we should add the name of Clifford C. Furnas.

Cliff Furnas, as he was known to his associates, was truly a broad-gauge person. His extensive publications, many highly technical for the professional specialist and an equal number addressed to the lay reader, attest to this fact. His writings indicate that as long ago as the early 1930's, he was sensitive to the potential impact on society of the then embryonic developments in science. It was his remarkable combination of imagination and foresight, coupled

with down to earth realism, that made his advice so valuable and so frequently sought.

Dr. Furnas was born October 24, 1900, at Sheridan, Indiana. He held the degree of Bachelor of Science, with honors, from Purdue University (1922), Doctor of Philosophy from the University of Michigan (1926), Honorary Doctor of Engineering from Purdue (1946) and the University of Michigan (1957), Honorary Doctor of Laws from Alfred University (1958), Honorary Doctor of Science from Thiel College (1960), Degree Honoris Causa from University Nacional de Asunción (Paraguay) (1963), and the Golden Cross of the Order of the Phoenix (Greece) (1963).

Dr. Furnas had always had a sustained interest in both research and education, and his working career reflected this quality. From 1926 to 1931 he conducted research work on metallurgical processes at the U.S. Bureau of Mines at Minneapolis, Minnesota. In the latter year he joined Yale University as Associate Professor in Chemical Engineering. In 1941 and 1942 he worked for the National Defense Research Committee, coordinating a large research and development program. He was appointed by CurtissWright as Director of its Aeronautical Research Laboratory in Buffalo in February 1943. This Laboratory was given to Cornell University on January 1, 1946, and he became Director and Executive Vice-President of Cornell Aeronautical Laboratory, Inc.

On September 1, 1954, Dr. Furnas assumed the post of Chancellor of the University of Buffalo. On December 1, 1955, he was granted a leave of absence by the University to serve as Assistant Secretary of Defense for Research and Development in Washington, D.C. He returned to his University of Buffalo post on February 15, 1957.

For a number of years Dr. Furnas was an active member of various technical boards and panels for the U.S. Government, particularly in the Department of Defense. He was Chairman of the Defense Science Board. He was also a Member of the Naval Research Advisory Committee, of the Army Scientific Advisory Panel, and of the Panel on Science and Technology of the House of Representatives Committee on Science and Astronautics, as well as many other advisory groups.

