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# MAURICE TAYLOR VAN HECKE

FRANK R. STRONG\*

The closing months of 1963 witnessed not only the national tragedy of President Kennedy's assassination, but the passing of several of the giants of the law-teaching world. Among those giants, each greatly mourned, was Maurice Van Hecke. For that host of warm friends which was his, things will never be the same with Van gone. And yet, a life lived so fully and so richly does not pass away. It does fade from the tangible reality of physical association to the intangible world of treasured memory. But it remains vibrant in the hearts of the many who held him in great affection.

A full four decades back from what was to be the year of his death, Maurice Van Hecke was a young law teacher at the University of Kansas. He had just come to Kansas after one year of teaching at West Virginia and two years at North Carolina. The teen-age son of one of his older colleagues, it was my rare privilege to become acquainted with him at that early time in his career and to know him well throughout the forty years which followed. With occasional departures for visiting, teaching, or public service, the great portion of those years he spent in his beloved Chapel Hill as a respected and revered member of the Faculty of the School of Law of the University of North Carolina. For ten of these years he served as Dean of the School of Law; for some twenty-five years, he gave his undivided energy to that which he loved best, the effective teaching of Equity courses.

From my first introduction to Professor Van Hecke to my last visit with Van as a cherished friend, I experienced those qualities of good-heartedness and good-naturedness which were among the hallmarks of the man. He drew wide his circle of friendship, to encompass all who responded to the warmth of his personality. Yet legion as were his friends, there was for each of them a marked measure of warm, personalized interest. For this kindly man, the world was indeed his oyster. Although no stranger to disappointment and sorrow, Maurice Van Hecke's gentle disposition included

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no element of bitterness or unhappiness. Fun-loving in a restrained way, always gregarious, and easily given to wholesome laughter, he was forever a joy to those fortunate enough to be in his company.

Professionally, Maurice Van Hecke enjoyed—and richly deserved—a full life. After graduation from the University of Chicago Law School he tasted the active practice in Chicago and in down-State Illinois experienced the trials of a legislative draftsman. Entering, then, the teaching branch of the legal profession he knew the thrill of the classroom and the let-down of bluebook grading; he had the exasperations yet satisfactions of casebook preparation, both solo and as a leading member of the group of Labor Law teachers who pioneered in educational collectivism; he participated both as a co-reporter and as an annotator in the challenging work of the American Law Institute; he experienced the vicissitudes of deaning; he knew the satisfaction of important contributions in the way of public service, for a Nation both at war and at peace; he took in prideful humility the recognition bestowed upon him by his teaching colleagues through election to the presidency of the Order of the Coif and, later, of the Association of American Law Schools; he shared a great concern for the welfare and the mission of law and lawyer in a democratic society; through much scholarly writing he left for posterity the imprint of his keen mind and his compassionate heart.

References to other facets of his rich and inclusive professional life could be extended almost *ad infinitum*. Two more bear especial attention. Maurice Van Hecke never failed to extend a helping hand to the young law teacher. Late in life, when most men have rested on their laurels, he accepted chairmanship of the new committee of the Association of American Law Schools designed to bring some order and dignity out of the traditionally chaotic procedures by which teaching aspirant and interested law school were brought together for mutual evaluation. Even as death approached he was busy with final preparations for the second year of experience with the new Registry of Candidates for Law Teaching Positions. Of long standing, also, was his concern that the Negro have his opportunity for legal education. Twenty years ago he was one of that devoted group from Duke and North Carolina who gave so fully of their energy and conviction to provide teaching excellence and academic dignity for the then new and struggling North Carolina College Law School

at Durham. And later, in the 1950s, with the effort to gain for the Negro law student the opportunities inherent in integrated professional education, he served energetically and effectively to achieve this objective among Association schools, with a minimum of fanfare and rancor.

Although Maurice Van Hecke has departed from our midst, the memory of this genial man will remain so long as his writings are read and his memory burns bright among those who knew and loved him. As has been said of others of Nature's noblemen, "The world is now a better place because he journeyed here."