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Michael H. Cardozo

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Vernon X. Miller: Association Man

MICHAEL H. CARDOZO*

The Association of American Law Schools has been involved for some years in the debate over the proper degree a law school graduate should receive. Perhaps it should pause on the occasion of Vernon X. Miller's retirement and consider the establishment of a degree of its own, an honorary A.M., Association Man. The justice of his being the first bearer of the degree is obvious. Faithful participant in thirty or so annual meetings, he moved through all the ranks of service to the AALS, becoming its President in 1965. As he took office, with due modesty, he told the "young people . . . from schools like mine" that "if you live long enough, and if you come to enough of these meetings, some one of you is bound to make it some time or other." It was not just patience, however, that impelled the membership to choose him for governing positions out of all those from "schools like his." It was devotion to the purpose of the Association that led to his election to serve, first in 1959 on the Executive Committee, then as "the last of the old-fashioned Secretary-Treasurers" and, ultimately, as President.

Throughout this period Dean Miller was helping to mold the Association into a constructive organization, counseling its officers, exhorting its members, serving on its committees, and creating its structure and its traditions. Name a part or function of the modern Association and you will find that Vernon Miller has played a part in its planning or design, from the *Journal of Legal Education* to the Regulations of the Executive Committee. Let the word of the first of the new-fashioned executive directors testify that it was his greatest good fortune to have as his boss, his neighbor, and his friend such a mine of data and wisdom about the new job in an old association.

Of course, study in two law schools, terms on the faculties of half a

* Executive Director, Association of American Law Schools.

dozen law schools, and finally election as dean of three schools, equipped him for these special services. He learned the problems, the needs, and the glories of legal education from many perspectives. It was inevitable that someone with his broad qualifications would be sought as a dean. The wonder is, however, that anyone, knowing him, would think he had sufficient of those peculiar characteristics, supposedly derived from canine ancestry on the distaff side, that traditionally qualify one for decanal success. Perhaps a sense of humor, close to the surface and unaffected by academic intrigue, is really the essential ingredient.

To have studied torts, constitutional law or other subjects in Dean Miller's classes must have been a rare polymathic experience. His fabulous memory has enabled him to draw on analogy, example, and history far beyond most classroom performers. "That case," you can hear him say, "was decided in 1927, the year the Yankees beat Pittsburgh in four straight games, and Babe Ruth hit sixty home runs." In another field, he might cite the example of a contemporary of Julius Caesar who first won an argument with *res ipsa loquitur*. Of course, as a railroad buff, Dean Miller naturally wrote many learned articles on the law of compensation in railroad cases. But woe unto you law students who do not recognize the name of an Horatio Alger hero, a client of Mr. Tutt, or a social phenomenon described by Anthony Trollope.

Indeed, a very catholic taste combined with a faithful Catholic spirit.