DEDICATION TO PROFESSOR JOHN P. DAWSON

With appreciation and respect, the Editors of the Boston University Law Review take pleasure in dedicating this issue to Professor John P. Dawson. Professor Dawson recently stepped down as Visiting Professor of Law at the Boston University School of Law, a position he held for eight years. During those years he continued to be a major factor in the development of the law and in the lives of those around him. As a legal scholar, Professor Dawson is a man of excellence. As an educator and a friend, he has always been generous with his time. His kindly wit, grace, and courtesy are exceeded only by his abiding commitment to legal education and the intellectual development of his students. Those of us fortunate enough to have been his students thank him for his time and effort, and wish only that others could have shared our experience.

JOHN PHILIP DAWSON

This opportunity to add a brief tribute to Jack Dawson in a student-planned dedicatory issue is a testimonial to the generosity of the editors of the Review and, I must add, to their recognition of an entitlement. For Jack has been my teacher over far more years than the editors cumulatively can claim. In September 1946, I began his course in Equity, never completed because of a brief interruption in my law study and his departure at the end of the semester for service in the government of Greece. In 1951, however, when I joined the Michigan faculty and shared with him the Contracts course, I began a period of learning from him which has not yet ended.

At other times and places, high tribute will be paid to Jack’s scholarship. My mission is more modest, but, I think, more important and more satisfying. It is to say something about a man and his teaching. In Jack’s case the two are inseparable. His classroom is not a stage for brilliant performances by a distinct persona. Rather, he has been able to provide his students both a personal and professional model that claimed their respect and affection. But his scholarship does not live in a room apart. Its historical depth, its comparative dimensions, and its range across subjects—Contracts, Equity, Restitution—that too often have shown in scholarly treatment the fragmentation of the curriculum, combined in the classroom to stimulate, challenge, illuminate, and enrich discussion of the cases in hand. Though he is familiar with the jurisprudential classics—indeed, I was surprised years ago to discover that he had taught them—Jack’s style and interest are not philosophical, and I suspect that he would agree with Thurman Arnold that jurisprudence is hard; like tossing feathers, endlessly, hour after hour, is hard. Not for him the sweeping generalization or the single useful insight expanded into

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a world view. He has seen the law as too intimately tied to a variable social context, pressing its insistent claim to continuity while responding to the urgencies of time and place, to be tempted by the inflexibilities of grand systems. Yet the students who have benefitted from his scholarship and teaching, from the patient shaping of detail so as to make patterns of growth and purpose clearer, have probably discovered that they have not been studying jurisprudence, but doing it.

Jack never practiced law, but accepted appointment to the Michigan faculty when his period at Oxford ended. He enjoys recalling that he accepted without question the cabled offer from Michigan, despite a major transmission error in the salary term, and thus learned early the hazards to achieving mutual assent. There has never been, I think, any doubt in Jack’s mind that for him teaching and scholarship are the only life. That commitment has been tested during wartime service as an official of the American government, as international trade administrator in the government of Greece during the post-war reconstruction, as a Congressional candidate, and as the offeree of appointment to a high judicial office. While opportunities to continue to teach are available, he has decided, after more than fifty years, to end his teaching career. The law reviews will continue, fortunately, to provide for him another forum and a larger body of students.

Great teaching is an art form beyond capture by analysis or description. Though some of its components can be identified, we struggle for their distinctive combination, their essence. This was well-illustrated for me a number of years ago when I interviewed for faculty appointment a man who had been one of Jack’s students at Harvard. When Jack was mentioned among the best teachers, I asked what made him so. The response was predictable: mastery of the subject, skill in the Socratic conversation, etc. But there was obviously something missing, and it came out the following day when the young man recalled his response and said: “But there’s something more: he was interested in what his students said and he built with it.” Thus left, the answer may still be incomplete, but it combines much that has made Jack the teacher he is: a deep understanding of his subject, skill in involving students in the shared enterprise, and, overarching, an interest in and respect for the young minds he is privileged to teach.

The half-century spanned by Jack Dawson’s teaching career has seen great changes in the American law schools. One of the most important, I think, and the one Jack talks about with the greatest appreciation, has been the appearance of women students in substantial numbers. I feel no surprise that this development has aroused Jack’s strongest enthusiasm. If a combination of articulate intelligence and firm character—joined in Emma McDonald Dawson with warm charm and a dry Scots humor—can make the case for women across the full spectrum of professional life, Jack has seen the case made daily in his own home. That explains perhaps why Jack’s reaction to the arrival of large numbers of women students has in it nothing of the latent patronizing often detectable in “affirmative action.” Rather, he welcomes them as peers to a profession they can serve with distinction.
To write in praise of a friend who, if he reads these words, will do so with a wry and doubting eye is no easy task. The most credible tribute perhaps should balance strengths against an occasional weakness. I, however, who can make no plausible claim to objectivity, must leave the balancing to others. To some, Jack's loyalty to his friends and his disposition to find in them merit possibly beyond their deserts might seem a failing, but, having benefitted so long, I cannot find fault.

The past eight years of close association with Jack at Boston University have been—both personally and professionally—deeply rewarding. I will recall his cheerful relish of the immunity from faculty meetings granted to "visiting professors." But I will remember as well his readiness in responding when called upon to render service not expected of visitors. I will miss him from the office next door—the quick pre-class question, the post-class chat about better ways of dealing with sometimes intractable material. I will regret that students no longer will have the opportunity to know him in the classroom, in office visits, or in the frequent small-group lunches he enjoyed. But thousands of Jack's students, graduates of several different schools, will remember with respect, appreciation, and affection a splendid teacher and a gracious, compassionate man. I shall be among them.

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