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A TRIBUTE TO PROFESSOR ROBERT SHERWOOD HUNT

Sir Desmond Heap*

And so my old friend Robert Sherwood Hunt (Bob, to me), after his distinguished career as a faculty member at the school of law at the University of Washington, decided to “call it a day” and retire. Issue 4, Volume 62, of the *Washington Law Review*, I am told, is to be dedicated to him as a mark of honour and respect. It is my deliberate wish and desire to be associated with this dedication. Accordingly, I write these few broken words as my own most sincere tribute to this remarkable teacher.

Bob hails from Iowa and, while he can, undoubtedly, be firm and categorical, he is in no way stubborn.¹ This year of grace, 1987, he becomes a septuagenarian—though, to look at him, you never would think so. Nor does he act like one—as anyone will readily confirm who has seen him (as I have) disporting himself in an Olympic-size swim pool, tearing away at a good rate of knots from one end to the other, swim-goggles awash and a wake of spume trailing behind him!

It is not my wish in this tribute to refer in any detail to Bob’s notable professional career, his distinguished war service in the U.S. Navy, 1940-46, when he served (in both the Atlantic and Pacific theatres of war) on board the U.S.S. Northampton, the U.S.S. Massachusetts, and the U.S.S. Flint, retiring as Lieutenant Commander, nor yet to his equally distinguished academic career at the Universities, respectively, of Iowa, Wisconsin, and Washington. I must, however, mention that at the University of Washington he fulfilled the offices of Professor of Law at the law school for twenty years, was Associate Dean of the law school for five years, and had the distinction of being made Professor Emeritus in 1986.

I want to speak rather of the man himself—the man whom I have had the great benefit and pleasure of knowing in the U.S.A. (mainland), in Hawaii (the off-shore island), and in London. Wherever we met, at the air terminal, the train station, or wherever, it was always a great joy to greet him, or be greeted by him. There he would be, his hat (he often wore a hat) set at a slightly jaunty angle, his smart raincoat (he often wore a raincoat because it often rains in Seattle, as I have noticed!), with its belt neatly trimmed, and that deep diapason voice of his giving the newly-arrived visitor a welcome the warmth of which it was impossible to miss. I had this experience several

* LL.M., Victoria University of Manchester, 1936; Hon. LL.D., University of Manchester, 1973.

1. In London we are taught that Iowa folks can be stubborn; the American musical *The Music Man* said so!

times when met by Bob at the Seattle airport. When greetings concluded he would then whisk me off to the bar, where a dry martini (U.S. style!) was speedily thrust into my hand. He has a wonderful way with a dry martini and an even more wonderful way with a second dry martini. He once saw me off at the Seattle airport, after a touch or two—or three—of his generous hospitality, and I arrived painlessly at London (Heathrow) after a very sound sleep *en route* and with no jet lag of any kind. (I believe he would have made a very good doctor if he hadn't made a very good lawyer!)

It was under his aegis that I lectured on several occasions at the University of Washington, and great occasions those were for me. (I hope they weren't too bad for the students.) I mentioned that I needed some exercise if I was to keep up with the young and eager students in my classes. In no time at all this most helpful man fitted me out with a fine pedal bike belonging to the daughter of a professional colleague. (I later met the young lady and am most grateful to her.) On this machine I toured Seattle, enjoying greatly the variegated waterfront and the grand view of Mount Rainier from the campus heights.

Bob is a stickler for order and decorum; he believes in the rule of law. Anyone who had the advantage of attending his classes can have no doubt about this for such is his authority (all easily and effortlessly projected across his class—the deep, diapason voice, already mentioned, undoubtedly being of great moment in this context) over the entire proceedings.

Accordingly, I soon learnt that he was a past-master in the art of punctuality. I well remember the occasion when I arrived back from Tacoma disturbingly late for my appointment with him at my hotel in Seattle. There he was, pacing the lobby with determined deliberation. I thought instantly of Queen Victoria; I distinctly heard the voice of Her Late Majesty—“We are not amused, Mr. Gladstone.” He whisked me off to the Space Needle for a fine dinner with Professor Tunks, who was then Dean. I said I was sorry and then, for the first time that evening, Bob's face broke into a smile. All was forgiven. I was then, and thereby, convinced that my earlier appraisal of the man had not been wrong.

It is said that, unlike the ladies, men never really grow up. Well, I can surely say that it is my firm belief that in Robert Sherwood Hunt, notwithstanding his many academic and professional distinctions, there is still a little boy struggling to get out. (I'll bet he was late himself more than once in his earlier days!) And here we come to the heart of the matter. It is this innate, simple, eager boyishness which makes the man such a born companion (with or without the dry martini) and such a splendid all-round chap. (He wrote law treatises, but he wrote about steam locomotives and trains!) He can be severe when he is teaching, but he can be completely kind, gentle, and totally relaxed when he is “off-duty” and attending a

party or some other kind of social occasion. He is, indeed, a very gregarious person, with a subtle, low-key sense of humour. Such folk are the salt of the earth.

Accordingly, I value my old friend and wish him well as he takes up a new kind of life-style, sojourning here and there—sometimes in Seattle and sometimes in France. (Well, why not France? He was born on Bastille Day—July 14th.) In France his house rejoices in the attractive title of, “Les Balmes,” and his town in the even more attractive title of “Saint-Didier-Au-Mont-D’Or.” Long may he rejoice in good health and happiness with his wife, sipping the best of French wine (which I know he loves) on the sun-burnt slopes of that golden mountain doing duty as genius loci of the place whenever Saint Didier himself feels in need of a sabbatical