Profile

A few years ago at one of the annual Law School skits, which tradition dictates the student body put on at the expense of the faculty, Malcolm P. Sharp was introduced by this ditty:

Malcolm, Malcolm, you are welcome  
With your ivy covered mind,  
Though no one can understand you  
You are good and wise and kind.

Read in the context of the tradition of genial defamation characterizing such events, this is a remarkably affectionate and apt characterization of one of the Law School’s great teachers. Every school has its few teachers who make the permanent impression and are remembered and slowly worked into legend. Malcolm Sharp is one of these.

Students remember Malcolm Sharp not for any rich eccentricity of manner or any pet doctrine but because he is always himself; his personality does not change when he enters the classroom. He is one of the fortunate few whose vocation coincides perfectly with his avocation. He is fond of quoting a teacher of his to the effect that a man who would not be willing to teach without pay for the sheer fun of it does not belong in teaching.

Malcolm Sharp is also heard to observe that, although his grandfather was a respectable storekeeper, since his day the family has been going down. His father was Frank Chapman Sharp, a distinguished professor of ethics and philosophy at the University of Wisconsin.

Sharp was graduated from Amherst and went on to the Harvard Law School. He later returned to Harvard for graduate studies and received the S.J.D.

His first teaching assignment was elementary Greek; his first full-time one the teaching of flying during World War I; and his next the teaching of economics. And then he got “mixed up with law.” On the Wisconsin law faculty from 1927 to 1933, Sharp has since been at the University of Chicago Law School.

But all his paths have not been those of Academe. After graduating from Law School, he practiced with Lowenthal, Zold and with Root, Clark, Buckner and Ballentine in New York. The years in practice left their indelible mark. Along with the quizzical paradox-loving professor side of his personality there is another which appears steadily in his law teaching: the pragmatic craftsman of the Wall Street bar. The mixture is just about right.

His Teacher’s Directory biography lists no fewer than fourteen subjects he has taught, and no one could doubt that he could, and would, teach the rest of the law curriculum with great ability. But for the last fifteen years his primary field has been Contracts, and he is recognized as one of the top authorities.

The Contracts course under Sharp is a special experience. The organization is subtle but beautifully worked out; the secrets are not given to the students prematurely.

As one temporarily exasperated first-year man said, “It’s like trying to pick up mercury.” But somewhere in the second quarter the light dawns, the pieces suddenly fall firmly into place, and, as student testimony confirms year after year, the class has been led through a rigorous and exciting intellectual experience.

He has contributed an important series of essays on the law of contracts, including Promissory Liability, 7 Univ. Chi. L. Rev. 1-23, 250-80 (1940); Review of Williston, 4 Univ. Chi. L. Rev. 30-44 (1936); Pacta Sunt Servanda, 41 Col. L. Rev. 783 (1941); Review of Ferson, 2 Jour. L. Educ. 235 (1949); and the recent Promises, Mistakes, and Reciprocity, 19 Uni. Chi. L. Rev. 286 (1952). In addition, he has been the guiding spirit behind a coherent and now formidable sequence of student notes appearing over the years in the Law Review on various aspects of Contract Law.

It is widely recognized that the ideal method of achieving the integration of law and the associated social sciences—a subject of much discussion in law schools these days—is not by way of separate courses but by having the teacher so well educated that he can use the material interstitially as the law course progresses. Not many teachers are blessed with the background or the skill this requires. But Sharp is one of these few, and the student has not only a rich and rigorous initiation to the law of contracts but a challenging exposure as well to an urbane civilized intellect.

The variety of Sharp’s interest is readily seen by a further look at his publications. In 1939 the volume Social

In recent years Sharp has been experimenting with two fields on the frontier of the law curriculum: international law and psychology. His concern for a peaceful solution to the "cold war" has brought him insight in the study of the psychology of aggression. In a series of essays he has evolved his central theme: the attractiveness of aggression for all of us and the dominant importance of the role of law in controlling it and directing it constructively. Perhaps the pivotal essay thus far is "Aggression: A Study of Values and Law," published in the International Journal of Ethics in 1947. Sharp has in the back of his mind a book toward which he is slowly working. It promises to be a significant one.

It may seem a mild academic joke that so gentle a man is so concerned with aggression, but, as he would be the first to point out, that is really his point about all of us. A courageous defender of civil liberties, students and colleagues throughout the University think of him as a watchman of freedom. No profile can catch the wit, the mellowness, the charm. Nor can it do justice to his perhaps most endearing characteristic. After even a quarter-century of teaching he remains essentially a young man with an open, fresh, curious mind.

The gifts of Malcolm Sharp’s years of teaching experience are now incorporated into his Cases on Contract, edited together with Professor Fritz Kessler of the Yale Law School, which will be published in the fall of 1952.

Among the Students

Again this year the Law School has been awarded the cup given by the Illinois State Bar Association to the winner of the Inter-School Moot Court Competition conducted by the Association. The members of the winning team are David V. Kahn, Julian Hansen, Robert S. Blatt and Maurice Jacobs. The Law School has now won the cup more times than any other school in the competition.

Chicago's loss will soon be Oxford's gain. Francis D. Logan, who entered The Law School last fall as a Kosmerl Scholar, has been awarded a Rhodes Scholarship and will begin his studies at Queen's College, Oxford, in the Michaelmas Term, 1952. Frank, who originally was a Winnetkan, but whose family now lives in Charlo, Montana, graduated from New Trier High School and The College of the University of Chicago.

Henry G. Manne, third-year student, recently won fourth place in a contest sponsored by the Robert S. Marx Foundation of Cincinnati. Manne's study, an essay on an automobile accident compensation plan, was among seven prize-winners in the annual competition.

Though this news properly belongs among alumni notes, The Law School makes claim to its students at least during their clerkships. We are pleased to announce that Robert Walker '30 is serving as clerk to Mr. Justice Clark and Abner J. Mikva '51 is clerking under Mr. Justice Minton. Both men are formerly Editors-in-Chief of the Law Review and members of The Order of the Coif. David M. Sloan '51, another former Law Review editor, is serving as clerk to Judge Casper Platt '16.

Alumni Directory

In the next months a questionnaire will be sent to all alumni for the School's use in compiling a new directory. We need your co-operation in filling out the form completely and returning it as soon as possible. We want to put the new directory in your hands at the earliest possible date.

While on a trip to California in January, Dean Levi met with a group of the Los Angeles alumni for lunch. Shown, first row (left to right), are: Joseph L. Lewison '07, Dean Levi, William D. Campbell '21. Rear row: Forrest Drummon '24, Deley T. Walton '24, Judge William T. Fox '20, and Judge Stanley Mosk '33. More than twenty-five alumni gathered for lunch and heard the Dean's presentation of the School's development plans.