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Robert E.R. Huntley

Charles V. Laughlin

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## CHARLES PORTERFIELD LIGHT, JR.

My first regular association with Dean Light occurred when I was a student in the Law School in the 1950's, a time when he was at the peak of his considerable powers as a teacher. He taught me torts and constitutional law and, in my senior year, federal jurisdiction. His lively and constantly varying treatment of these subjects — which in the hands of a less talented teacher can quickly dampen a young law student's enthusiasm for the study of law — transmitted to me as to many hundreds of others over the years a special kind of excitement which one only gets, if ever, when he perceives the law as a dynamic rather than a static process through which human beings grope their way towards a civilization that will work.

I remember so well the way he would move back and forth across the raised dais in the classroom, orchestrating his lecture with quick punctuating gestures, returning now and then to his seat to consult the cases before him which he knew by heart but which always held for him some new nugget of truth or suggested to him and through him to us some new insight and dimension. For me it was like a lively exploration of new ground and seemed to hold forth the promise of infinite possibilities for new discovery. In all the years that followed, Charlie never disappointed this tacit promise, and until the time of his death the greatest recreation for me was the experience I was often privileged to have of discussing with him some issue or problem, sometimes hypothetical, sometimes not. He had that truly rare ability quickly to define and confine the matter, expose its many facets for discussion and analysis, while at the same time never abstracting it from the real world to which it related.

With this rare legal and analytical ability, Dean Light combined another set of characteristics perhaps even rarer. I can think of no good words quickly to summarize this set of characteristics except, perhaps, wit and civility. By wit I mean of course humor, including that essential ingredient of humor; the ability to laugh at oneself. By wit I also mean something more, an incisiveness and quickness of mind which allowed him to see quickly into other people and, equally

as quickly, relate himself to them. Such wit is not always combined with civility, but in Dean Light it was. Though he did not tolerate fools willingly, he did tolerate them, and without condescension. To put it negatively, he took no pleasure in humbling others. At the same time, he adopted no false pose of humility; quite simply, he wanted to think well of others and generally managed to do so. For all these reasons, he was for me when I came here to teach as a new young faculty member in the Law School a major source of advice, comfort and friendship. My affection for him was deep, and I think he knew it.

Among lawyers and law teachers elsewhere in the state and in the nation Dean Light was always welcomed with a warmth reserved for very few. For example, at meetings of the Virginia Bar Association, if for some unusual reason he could not attend, his absence was remarked with regret by nearly everyone there, for they found the same pleasure in conversation with him that we in Lexington knew so well. Generally, he eschewed formal recognition and position but was constantly sought out both for his professional expertise and for his civilizing and humanizing influence on any discussion. And his wit was as well known elsewhere as it was here.

On a few occasions in the past I have noted that in my judgment Washington and Lee's greatest strength and tradition over the years has been its rather unusual ability to attract the devotion and service of persons with truly special characteristics. Among those persons are a few whose mark on Washington and Lee, though intangible, is indelible. Charlie Light is among those few, and we are grateful he passed this way.

*Robert E. R. Huntley\**

The passing of Charles Porterfield Light, Jr., on November 19, 1976, marked the end of an era for the law school of Washington and Lee University. The last of the "old guard"<sup>1</sup> was now no longer with us. Light was identified with the Washington and Lee community for

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\* President of the University and Professor of Law; A.B. (1950), LL.B. (1957) Washington and Lee University; LL.M. (1962) Harvard University; Dean of the Law School (1967-1968).

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<sup>1</sup> This term, "old guard," is here used to designate five Washington and Lee law teachers: William H. Moreland, Clayton E. Williams, Charles R. McDowell, Raymon T. Johnson and Charles P. Light, Jr. This group has also been referred to as "the famous five" by some law school alumni. It is probably rare that any group of five persons has been as intimately identified with a single educational institution for as

a period of fifty years (1926-1976). Although he was distinguished by accomplishment in several collateral lines of activity, the law school remained the central feature of Light's life and work for these fifty years.

Charles P. Light was born December 29, 1902, at Martinsburg, West Virginia.<sup>2</sup> As a child in Martinsburg, Charles was held on the lap of a young newspaper editor. That editor later became the distinguished senator from Virginia, Harry F. Byrd, Sr. While still a youth, Light moved with his parents from Martinsburg to Washington, D.C., where he attended the public schools and was graduated from Western High School. Light was graduated from the Virginia Military Institute in 1923 and immediately thereafter attended the Harvard Law School. Upon being graduated from that institution, he joined the Washington and Lee law faculty in 1926. He became Professor of Law in 1937 and subsequently became the first editor of the Law Review. He was dean from 1960 to 1967. In the fall semester of 1967, Light was followed as dean by Professor Robert E. R. Huntley. When, after one semester as dean, Huntley was elevated to the presidency of the University, Light was again recalled as dean for the spring semester of 1968, until being succeeded by the present dean, Roy L. Steinheimer. Light referred to himself as having "succeeded his successor."

Like all law teachers, particularly young ones, Light taught in many fields. His major academic endeavors, however, were in the fields of Constitutional Law and Torts. He had the reputation of being an interesting and lively classroom teacher. Professor Light on the edge of the platform kept his students on the edge of their seats.

For a number of summers between 1926 and 1939, Light obtained valuable experience and supplemented his income by an association with the prestigious Washington law firm of Covington & Burling. In that connection he worked especially with the late Dean Acheson. This association undoubtedly added realistic insight and great vision to Light's law school teaching.

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long a period of time as these five were with the Washington and Lee law school. They were the entire law faculty for a period of eleven years, 1926 to 1937. From that date forward there were a few additions, and Moreland died in 1945; Johnson in 1948. The three remaining members of this group of five continued as the hard core nucleus of the law faculty until Williams' retirement as dean in 1960. These five, or a majority of them, were the mainstay of the law school for over a third of a century.

<sup>2</sup> That he was technically born in West Virginia was a source of disappointment to Light, who preferred to think of himself as a Virginian. Quite reasonably he thought that the West Virginia Panhandle should have remained a part of Virginia. He harbored resentment against the president of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad who caused those northern counties to be separated from Virginia and added to West Virginia because he did not want his line to run through "rebel territory."

Second only to Light's accomplishments as a law teacher was his distinguished career with The Judge Advocate General's Corps of the United States Army. Upon being graduated from Virginia Military Institute, Light received a reserve commission in the infantry arm of the United States Army Reserve Corps. He desired, however, to combine his legal and military interests, and so took extensive correspondence courses in Military Law offered by the War Department. As a result of that endeavor he was transferred to The Judge Advocate General's Corps in the late 1920's. As the storm clouds which resulted in World War II were gathering, the need to build up our military establishment became highly evident. Light was called into active duty with The Judge Advocate General's Corps at the rank of major in the autumn of 1940.<sup>3</sup> Spanning a twenty year period, Light knew all of the Judge Advocate Generals. He worked especially closely with and was an intimate friend of Judge Advocate Generals Gullion and Brannon. Light was twice promoted and was finally relieved from active duty and transferred to the reserves at the rank of colonel. He was awarded the Legion of Merit for distinguished service.

Light's principal duty assignments during World War II were with the Bermuda Base Command and with the General Staff Corps. It was in the former connection that he enjoyed the experience of meeting his future wife, Percy Kinnear, then a Canadian citizen but now a United States citizen. Two daughters were born to that marriage.<sup>4</sup> In the second of the two assignments he served as liaison officer between The General Staff Corps and The Judge Advocate General's Corps. Particularly sensitive responsibilities were involved.

Between 1953 and 1960 a United States Army Reserve unit was established in connection with Washington and Lee Law School to train reserve line officers and some enlisted personnel in military law. Because of the high regard with which Colonel Light was held in The Judge Advocate General's Corps, Washington and Lee was one of the two law schools selected for this program.<sup>5</sup>

Light was active in many professional, academic and social organizations. Outstanding among his professional associations were the

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<sup>3</sup> Incidentally, it was Light's call to active duty which first brought the writer to Washington and Lee. I came to "pinch hit" for Light, not to "fill his shoes" or take his place.

<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth Harlan (Mrs. Paul Cressor, III, of Marion, Ohio) and Winifred Percy (Mrs. Edward L. Flippen, of Richmond, Virginia). There are also four grandchildren.

<sup>5</sup> There was no formal connection between the law school and this U.S.A.R. unit. However, all student participants in the program were students of the Washington and Lee law school. The University graciously allowed the use of the university premises for the program without cost to the government. The writer assisted Colonel Light in the conduct of this school. It was in this connection that I had occasion to observe Light's skill as a teacher. The instruction was supervised by The Judge Advocate General's School in Charlottesville, Virginia.

American Law Institute (which honored him by a bestowal of life membership), the American Bar Association, and the Virginia Bar Association. He rarely missed a meeting of the latter and was a leader in various of its projects. One of his many other associations should not be overlooked: The Alfalfa Club, founded by his father, which is the principal rival to the nationally famous Gridiron Club.

In addition to being a law teacher and dean, Light's service for the University took other forms. For a goodly number of years he was Marshal of the University. This involved the ceremonial function of carrying the University mace and leading the academic procession at all University convocations. In addition to these ceremonial functions, Light's position as University Marshal involved the very important duty of deciding whether Commencement would take place on the front campus or in the gymnasium. Every commencement morning, Light had to be on campus at 5:00 a.m. to anticipate the trend of the weather and to make a command decision as to whether to set up chairs on the campus or indoors.

With the passing of Charles P. Light, Jr., the writer feels the loss of a colleague, supervisor, and one of his best friends. Light expected high standards of accomplishment from those serving under him, but he held himself to standards which were just as severe. He was always thoughtful and considerate. He could sense a need, and would take steps to help a critical situation without having to be asked. He was generous both with his substance and with his time. He possessed great dignity without the slightest pomposity. Light enjoyed the good things of life, and was often the "life of the party." He had a sharp humor, but was never unkind. There truly was a gentleman and a scholar.

*Charles V. Laughlin\*\**

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\*\* Professor of Law, Washington & Lee University; A.B. (1929), LL.B. (1930), The George Washington University; LL.M. (1940), Harvard University; J.S.D. (1942), The University of Chicago.

