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A Tribute to James Harmon Barnett, Jr.

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A TRIBUTE TO JAMES HARMON BARNETT, JR.

The Board of Editors of the Review respectfully dedicates this issue to the memory of James Harmon Barnett, Jr., 1891-1970, Professor of Law at the University of Richmond for 50 years.

JAMES H. BARNETT, JR.—AN APPRECIATION

*William T. Muse**

FOR the first time in fifty years the Law School will be without the services of Mr. Barnett. His wise direction of the course of the School in the early days of national accreditation and the full devotion of himself to all areas of school life will continue to have their wholesome and lasting influence on the Law School as it begins its second century of service. The loss of a faculty member sometimes means the loss of an able administrator, sometimes a teacher of great talent, sometimes a scholar, sometimes a wise counsellor, sometimes a great personality. In the passing of Mr. Barnett we have lost all of these and more.

I first encountered Mr. Barnett in the Spring of 1927. I called at the Law School on Lombardy Street to seek admission in the class beginning in September. Because of the difficulty of obtaining funds, I had the idea of attending night classes and working during the day. He strongly advised me to attend the day division if at all possible since it afforded the better legal education. As a student, a faculty member, and particularly as dean, I never made a major decision without seeking his advice. Later events always proved his advice to be sound. He was a wise man.

Mr. Barnett was also a kind man. A member of the staff once characterized him by saying she knew he had never had a mean thought in his

*Dean and Professor of Law, University of Richmond School of Law.

life. He was tolerant of the faults of others. Once I sought the advice of Mr. B and our Librarian. Let Miss Ivey (now Mrs. Virginia Klingel) tell it: "He and I had been in your office about some offense of a student. You were going to do something Mr. B and I thought out of proportion to the offense to get even with the student and to teach him a lesson. On the way back upstairs Mr. B frowned, shook his head and said, 'I wish Muse wouldn't do that; it isn't worthy of him.' Then he took a few more steps and stopped. He looked at me with a half smile on his face and said, 'I guess we all have our faults.' It's an incident I have never forgotten for there was all love and all forgiveness in it, the two greatest Christian qualities a man can have."

Once a student was rude to Mr. Barnett in the class in Wills. It was obvious that something was wrong for the whole class was gathered in the corridor. Later one of the students said that the whole class was ready to tear the rude student to pieces. Nobody, and that meant nobody, was going to be rude to Gentleman Jim and get away with it. That student said he gave the rude one an hour and a half to apologize orally and in writing to Mr. B, and "if he doesn't do it I told him I was going to take him out on Lombardy Street and flatten him out; if I can't do it, there are sixteen others in the class who can and will." Needless to say, the student apologized and the apology was graciously accepted. This happening illustrates the respect and love his students had for him. This love and respect was shared in full measure by his colleagues as well.

In any law school one finds but a few people whose impact is so great that they set the intellectual and moral tone of the school. Mr. Barnett was preeminent in playing this role in The T. C. Williams School of Law. He was a man of great strengths.

He was a warm and gentle colleague and friend, uncompromising with principle but understanding of personal weaknesses. Those who knew him admired him. Those who knew him well loved him.

A HALF CENTURY OF LOYAL DEVOTION

*M. Ray Doubles**

JAMES HARMON BARNETT, JR., beloved professor emeritus and professor of law for half a century at The T. C. Williams School of Law in the University of Richmond, entered the bar of the court of eternal justice on November 21, 1970.

"Jim" Barnett, as he was affectionately known by his friends and colleagues, came to the Law School in 1920 as a member of the faculty and to act as Secretary of the School. In that capacity he performed all of the duties ordinarily associated with the office of a dean. The School at that time, although fifty years old, was an unaccredited night school. Though the faculty, consisting of prominent Richmond lawyers, was excellent, the standards for admission were low, and the library and other formal aspects of the school were poor.

Due almost entirely to the imagination of Jim Barnett, his dogged perseverance, long hours of toil, and refusal to see his dream frustrated by seeming obstacles, the school became fully accredited, staffed with an adequate full-time faculty supplemented by part-time instructors and operating as an orthodox three year morning school with an up-to-date curriculum and a more-than-adequate library.

His chief characteristic as an instructor was his insistence that the student answer his own questions. A question by a student invariably brought a series of questions in response. Many found this to be an exasperating experience, but the professor was a kind-hearted disciplinarian who did his utmost to kindle in the student the burning zeal for deep law study that burned in his own heart.

While the green eyeshade, his hallmark, is gone, and his soft Kentucky drawl has been silenced, both of which were institutions within an institution, his lifetime devotion to Alma Mater is his legacy indelibly engraved in the annals of The T. C. Williams School of Law.

*Professor of Law and Former Dean, University of Richmond School of Law.

JAMES HARMON BARNETT, JR.

*Julian E. Savage**

HE was my teacher. He was my friend.

He was a friend to all his students. Somehow every student, from the first day they sat in his class, knew this, instinctively. He was a gentle man; a kind man; a courteous man; and a true scholar of the law. His gentleness, his kindness, his courtesy and his scholarship were extended, impartially and generously, to everyone.

The English language contains many colorful words for use to eulogize a man, but the words that come so naturally and immediately to mind to describe James H. Barnett, Jr., are the old, simple, strong and enduring words "good, patient, wise, humble, dependable, understanding and friendly." Many men possess charm and sophistication and have a polished "public image," and we sometimes find ourselves wondering just what the "real" man is like. This thought would never enter your mind about James Barnett. You knew the twinkle in his eye was sparks from his soul; you knew the friendly thought softly expressed was sincere; you knew the desire to stimulate scholastic curiosity in you as a student was genuine. You knew that should you be successful in pursuing the legal principle at hand to its logical conclusion that his pleasure at your success would exceed your own. For this he lived.

We each grow older; so busily engaged with acquiring things and recognition. Then, suddenly, with startling clarity, we realize that so few things we do are really important; so few things we do are for others; so few things we do will have any degree of permanence. The life of James Harmon Barnett, Jr., was different. What he did with his life was to share himself and his knowledge with others. This was important. What he did with his life was to give it to others. What gives permanence to his life is that he is still living—in others.

So many are they who can say: "He was my teacher. He was my friend."

*Member of the Virginia Bar.

JAMES H. BARNETT, JR.: A CASE OF THE PROPER CHOICE
OF LIFE'S PRIORITIES

*Harry L. Snead, Jr.**

MR. BARNETT was utterly devoted to his wife, Mary, who had forsaken a promising career as a pianist in order to marry him. He often used her in classroom illustrations (particularly in Sales), always referring fondly to her as "Mrs. B." He spoke of his son and grandchildren with quiet pride and deep affection.

Toward his friends Mr. Barnett was totally selfless. During the Depression he entrusted his meager life's savings with a friend to enable his friend to enter a new business venture. Although Mr. Barnett was later made General Counsel of the friend's prospering business, this was not the motive for his act. His friends were many and his loyalty to them was almost beyond comprehension. Clearly, his first priority in life was duty and devotion to his family and friends.

Mr. Barnett's second priority was the law school. He searched for new young teachers in his classrooms and he exhibited great unselfishness toward young teachers by surrendering to them some of his favorite courses—a traumatic experience for any professor. Mr. Barnett led me into the teaching field by allowing me, during my third year as a law student, the privilege of teaching six hours of his course in Administration of Decedent's Estates. Needless to say, I emulated his excellent teaching methods.

The teaching mode of Professor Barnett included a carefully planned series of hypothetical situations designed to force the student to a reasoned and reasonable answer. As students we never felt he was reading his notes; he seemingly was lecturing and questioning *ad lib*.

Mr. Barnett never used profanity or told an off-color story. His unaffected dignity was such that, to my knowledge, no one ever told a smutty story or uttered profanity around him. He quit smoking in mid-life and was not a drinking man. He sometimes enjoyed a glass of champagne, but frequently he refused his "one glass."

He was proud of his military training and rank during World War I (he was a Captain), and he had a strict, almost severe, sense of loyalty to the law school. He could tolerate little less in anyone else.

Almost everyone who has conversed with Mr. Barnett has observed that he had a very distinct and different conversational style. He would employ

*Professor of Law, University of Richmond School of Law.

a parenthetical reference within another parenthetical reference—sometimes several of them—in a sentence. Some unobservant persons might say he “rambled” and ignored the initial point of the conversation, but this simply is not true. He always came back to and discussed the initial point of the conversation. His so-called “rambling” style was actually a great tribute to his mind and interests. He had a phenomenal memory for persons, places, things and events. Therefore, each thing he mentioned would remind him of some related event or person. His deep and sincere interests in persons, our families, and events in our lives endeared him to both students and fellow faculty members.

Mr. Barnett's third priority was a legitimate one, but he unjustifiably felt the need to rationalize because his loyalty to the law school was so great. He believed in exercise and sports because, as he put it, “it helps clear the cobwebs from your brain and makes you a better teacher.”

When I knew him he had developed a fondness, almost an obsession, for golf, which he began playing during his late thirties. His only instruction consisted of reading and watching commercial movies that, in the 1930's, showed short features of Robert Jones' golf swing. In his later years there was a peculiarity to his game which I never understood: All of his shots were hit with essentially the same trajectory; even his nine-iron shots had about the same trajectory as his drives, but, to my astonishment, those low approach shots would fly onto the green and hold. Judging from the trophies he accumulated, I would estimate that, in his prime, he consistently carried about a seven handicap. The mounted ball in his office attested to his hole-in-one; he would tell you about it only if you made more than a casual inquiry.

The last two rounds of his life were, all circumstances considered, perhaps the finest of his golfing career and, because they tell so much about his character, deserve more than a brief description. However, we first must have some more background.

In his later years Mr. Barnett had three surgical operations: One was a removal of a large part of the muscle from his upper left arm; the other two were cataract operations on both eyes. The cataract operations were not a complete success and, as a result, during the last four or five years of his life, although he hit practice balls almost every day, Mr. Barnett played but one round of golf a year, and that was in the law school tournament named after him—the Barnett Invitational. The surgery had shortened his distance considerably and seriously affected his distance computations

and unusually fine putting. He never complained or ever commented on these disabilities, but merely practiced more diligently to compensate.

At the age of seventy-seven he played the next to his last round of golf. Cold, gale force winds swept over the hilly and unfamiliar course; he pulled his own golf cart. On the front nine he scored an amazing forty-three, but, tiring on the back nine, he carded a forty-six—a fine eighty-nine under those adverse conditions.

His last round of golf was played the following year at the age of seventy-eight. Again the course was unfamiliar. The day was warm and windless. This time he elected to ride an electric cart. Due to pin placement on this particular day—the greenskeeper had illegally placed the pins within two feet of the front of the greens—the player had the choice of playing to the center of the green and “lagging” a putt toward the flag, or aiming short of the green and chipping within four to eight feet of the pin with the hope of sinking his first putt. Our foursome, including Mr. Barnett, reluctantly resigned ourselves to hitting short of the green and, hopefully, sinking our chip or our first putt. We were all perplexed by Mr. Barnett’s decision to persistently, and futilely, attempt a difficult “trick” chip shot which, had it been successful, would have left his ball only a few inches from the cup. Why was he consistently unwilling to risk a four to eight foot putt? It was only at the end of the round that I arrived at what I know was the answer: The man could not see the cup from beyond three to four feet; he was putting “blind” and was too proud to ask one of us to stand at the cup so he could judge its exact location. He lost several strokes because of our insensitivity to his handicap. Fittingly, however, his last drive was hit perfectly flush and square, and he one-putted his last green.

I shall not record his actual score on that round, although it was respectable. The number of Mr. Barnett’s strokes during that round certainly would have been less, and he would have equalled or bettered his previous year’s score, if we had been observant enough to assist him in overcoming his visual difficulties.

Mr. Barnett always kept two or three golf clubs in his office. He enjoyed tinkering with his “grip,” and we enjoyed discussing golf theory rather than law. You could usually detect his presence in the hall by the clanking of his golf clubs as he returned from “clearing the cobwebs from his brain.”

On Thursday afternoon, my office door slightly ajar, I heard the familiar tinkle of his golf clubs and caught a quick glimpse of his still erect figure passing down the corridor; then he engaged in a lengthy and animated discussion of law with a young professor in an adjoining office.

On the following Saturday night he was gone. During his last days his priorities and interests were the same as they were when I first knew him—his family and friends, the law school, and golf.

In writing about a lesser man one might feel compelled to be fulsome. For Mr. Barnett it suffices to borrow from psychologist Abraham H. Maslow's writings and ideas and say simply—he was man at his best.