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George Palmer

Terrance Sandalow

University of Michigan Law School, sandalow@umich.edu

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GEORGE PALMER

*Terrance Sandalow**

I first met George Palmer, nearly fifteen years ago, when I came to Ann Arbor to discuss the possibility of joining the faculty. The chairman of the Personnel Committee had scheduled the customary round of informal meetings with small groups of faculty members. As I recall, the first two of these meetings were marked by a certain awkwardness that I have since learned is common when faculties are interviewing someone already in teaching. The participants all understand that the object of such meetings is to permit judgments to be made about one another's intellectual qualities; yet, a certain delicacy, generally absent when the prospective faculty member is not yet in teaching, leads everyone to avoid the appearance that anyone is being tested.

No such awkwardness marred my meeting with the group that included George Palmer. It was immediately evident that George believed our purpose in coming together was not social, for which the exchange of pleasantries might suffice, but intellectual. Pleasantly, but persistently, George sought evidence of whether I satisfied the standards of rigorous analysis, precision, and careful expression that he demanded of those who would serve on the Michigan faculty. Even now, nearly fifteen years later, I recall it as an invigorating experience.

Not long after joining the faculty, I learned that generations of students had already given a name to such encounters with George. They called it "being Palmerized." To be "Palmerized," for the benefit of those unfamiliar with the expression, is to be subjected to one of life's most painful experiences, the pain of disciplined thought. For more than thirty years, George delighted in inflicting that pain upon his students and colleagues.

In recent years, the notion has grown up that discipline and pain are foreign to education, even inimical to it, and that intellectual standards are wholly personal. George has never succumbed to that cant. Even during the late '60s and early '70s, when the assault upon the intellect was at its peak, his demands upon students did not lessen. Yet, George's refusal to bend with the wind did not diminish his hold upon students. They seemed to understand, even when they did not fully comprehend, that his

* Dean and Professor of Law, University of Michigan. A.B. 1954, J.D. 1957, University of Chicago.—Ed.

insistence upon the maintenance of intellectual standards represented a commitment to their and the public's well-being that was far deeper than the professions of concern that others at times offered as a substitute.

Readers of this issue who know George Palmer will anticipate his embarrassment as he reads these tributes. Perhaps it will ease that embarrassment to point out that our purpose is not only to honor him, but to serve the institution to which he devoted so much of his life. For by recalling his contributions, we are better able to set our own sights.