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Cecil Morgan

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TUCKER THE HUMANIST

*Cecil Morgan**

John Tucker was born February 25, 1891. He was 7 1/2 years my senior. He entered LSU Law School a year after I did, graduating in 1920, and we both started practicing law in Shreveport in 1920. I held him in great awe, and for good reason. He had graduated from Washington and Lee in 1911. He was very much the military man having served on the Mexican border in 1916, and had an enviable World War One record in France and even in Northern Russia, with decorations and rank to prove it. Later in World War Two he earned the title of Colonel by which he was thereafter known, and of which he was justly proud.

While we were both attending LSU Law School at the same time, my youth and lack of preparation enhanced my respect for him, and consequently it took us awhile to become the friends we were in later years, and to appreciate the humanistic qualities of his nature.

I had to break through the armor of his commanding military presence, his towering intellect, his apparent arrogance of superior scholarship, his obsession and bias for the Justinian, French and Civil Law, to find beneath that armor the warmth of a gentler nature, a true friend, a more tolerant attitude toward the foibles of human behavior, and his accommodation to the opinions of those with whom he differed, though he may have forcefully expressed himself against them, even as any truly self-respecting egoist might do.

That seemingly impenetrable armor had vulnerable spots, which consciously or inadvertently could be probed with profit and pleasure. I found his human qualities always interesting, always informative, always stimulating and often challenging.

Little things in life that make us human have an appeal that opens doors to friendships and companionship. For instance, John was a gourmand, not in the pejorative sense, but encompassing the gourmet. He could cook. He partook of the delicacies of the finest cuisines of Europe, especially France, and to have heard his arguments with a chef over the preparation of the prospective feast must have been a pleasure to be savored in itself, flavored as it was with his Ark-La-Tex accent

* Member Louisiana State Bar.

to his more grammatical French, with the touch of the ancient legal style and a dash of Tabasco. With the wine-steward he was fully at home, and indeed was a member of, correction, Grand Officer Confrerie des Chevaliers du Tastevin. That vouches for his good taste in any language.

He was a lover of nature. He viewed the marvels and beauties of the wild life that surrounded his camp on Lake Bisteneau amid moss covered trees and flowering and tangled vines, ensconced in his rocker and protected from insects and bats with all the creature comforts one could desire. Fishing skiffs on Caddo Lake furnished another point of vantage from which to enjoy nature and contribute to the rounding out of his Izaak Walton education, and ultimately make him The Compleat Angler. Arthur Shuey taught him to fly fish. Arthur's son, John Shuey, a teenage youth who in recent years has been the chairman of the Supreme Court's Committee on Admissions to the Bar, paddled the boat, while John Tucker was learning to fly fish from Arthur. Both performed most skillfully, to John's great satisfaction, for each was rewarded by the gift of one of John's museum piece fly rods from his great collection. Thus, the anglers became fast friends.

In his camp environment, John was surrounded by convivial companions coming from all walks of life, who consumed many a draught of that common denominator of beverages, the brew bearing labels from Anheuser Busch to Jax, though John himself preferred to drink vermouth-cassis.

This was a far cry from the pomp and circumstance he also loved. He was a true patriot, a lover of history, and consorted with the great in military, academic, governmental and journalistic circles, with all the accompanying social appurtenances. His civic interests and affiliations are popularly known.

Needless to say that in favorable surrounding as in all other gatherings of people of all persuasions, John Tucker's command of the spoken word prevailed, even if it sometimes reverted to the vernacular. True his anecdotes ranged from the scholarly to the corny, but could hardly be matched in length or pointedness by his captive audiences. Interestingly enough, the whole was enjoyed by each, in spite of the frustration of a feeling of being excluded.

In an entirely different setting, Tommy Lemann and I engaged in a conspiracy to break the flow of what we now politically refer to as rhetoric. If giving one's self a birthday party might seem a bit self-serving, not so with John Tucker because innumerable friends enjoyed his hospitality to such an extent that they came from near and far to Shreveport for several of his more advanced years' anniversaries. These parties were one-man shows, and some of us friends and relatives wanted at least to deliver a toast, but no chance was given nor would he consent to open his agenda for such a happening. So on his 80th or so birthday, Tommy and I agreed on a highly improper and undignified procedure. By pre-arrangement between us, in the midst of John's monologue, I

burst into the scene, demanded the floor without John's consent and to his utter surprise and apparent dismay, I took over the meeting and turned the gavel over to Tommy who recognized several people who came forth with warm, witty and affectionate toasts in celebration of his birthday. Whereupon we returned the gavel to John and he resumed his oration with a scowl, though some of us noted that the scowl was a screen to keep back any semblance of the true appreciation he had for their comments. Our next encounter was a few years later, and he had another landmark birthday party, and Tommy and I decided we would approach him well in advance and get his consent to let us in on a toast or two, and he flatly refused. However, when I could privately talk to him on the phone at the last minute, he quietly said to me, "No, I can't let anyone in on the program, but why don't you do what you did last time and just break in?" That we did knowing his great appreciation. One needed to know John to get away with such disreputable conduct.

John's love for his alma mater, Washington and Lee, lasted all his life. He has shown it in many ways, and it undoubtedly had a great influence on him. He had an especial love for LSU through the Law School and his devotion and enormous respect for the scholar of that Law School, the teacher of the Civil Law, Dean Tullis. I think his admiration for Dean Tullis was the inspiration for all that he has done in the way of the collection of his great library of French law he has given to LSU, and John's eventual scholarly contributions in the field of the Civil Law.

His scholarship and obsession with the Civil law did not penetrate the depths of his inner self. Probably his close friendship with LeDoux Provosty had an impact on his bigness and breadth, and his ecumenism, for he often attended the Roman Catholic retreats. But he, like Samuel Butler's Hudebras, was a Presbyterian true blue: he could distinguish and divide a hair twixt south and southwest side. He was deeply religious, and a human philosopher. He was aware of the human need for religion in our lives.

To know something of a man's finer sensibilities, a bit of traveling companionship is most helpful and enjoyable. Margaret and I joined Hortense and John on some jaunts, especially on and about London and the English countryside. While John and I talked of the immediate things about us with the girls, we also talked about the Inns of Court, and British history and institutions, in which the girls participated between their episodes of ladies chatter of antiques, the beauties of the countryside, French perfumes and hautescouture, pretermittting the civil code and the law institute for the moment. We attended a service at St. George's Chapel at Windsor Castle, had a gourmet feast at a country restaurant called The Compleat Angler, and drove on to Stoke Poges in Buckinghamshire to the Church of St. Giles and paid homage to the tomb of Thomas Gray. We took turns quoting passages from his reverential "Elegy Written in a Country Church-Yard" as we reveled in

the scenes we viewed which Gray described in such elegant verse. We reflect on that verse and its applicability today to John.

Gray said:

The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power,
And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave,
Awaits alike the inevitable hour;
The paths of glory lead but to the grave.

John had and enjoyed the good things of this life that count. He savored and appreciated them, and has carried that appreciation to his grave.