

Miles O. Price

By MARY W. OLIVER* AND LUCILE M. ELLIOTT**

To a neophyte in the law library profession, the name Miles O. Price was an unfamiliar one, but it was not to remain so for long. Indeed, within a short period of time that same name would evoke a mental picture of an already-legendary figure, a many-faceted personality only partially described as the dean of law librarians, a great teacher, a fine bibliographer, a valued critic, a good friend, a real professional, and *the* authority on all aspects of law librarianship, including where and how to find a job.

I was one of many whose first contact with Miles Price was made in connection with his placement activities. During my last year in law school, knowing that I was planning a trip to New York, Miss Lucile Elliott, law librarian at the University of North Carolina, suggested that I contact Mr. Price and discuss with him the job opportunities that might be available. Preceded by an introductory letter from Miss Elliott, I made an appointment, and with some trepidation arrived at Columbia. The cordial reception I received made me immediately feel at ease, and the suggestions from Mr. Price were extremely helpful. My experience with him on that occasion was by no means unique; rather, it was just another instance of his kindness and concern for people new in the law library profession. Mr. Price's interest and participation in placement continued after his retirement. In a recent letter Mrs. Price wrote, "The last thing he did before he went to the hospital was to help a young woman in Maine find a library job."

Mr. Price was one of the pioneers in providing an educational opportunity for those wishing to better prepare themselves for the profession. His students formed a distinguished, enthusiastic, and devoted group of alumni whom he continued to teach and counsel long after they had completed their formal course work under him. Miss Sarah Leverette of the University of South Carolina, one of this group, has said, "He was able to take people of varying backgrounds and experience and instill in them

an understanding and a feel for law librarianship, giving each what he needed. Recognizing that some of us were 'green as grass' he nonetheless set a high standard which we were required to meet." But he had many other "students." These had received no formal instruction under him, but he taught them through his books, his articles, and professional contacts. They relied on him for answers to difficult technical questions, for advice on professional problems, and for encouragement. He was generous in expending his time and energies in this way; and, while his answers to queries were not always pleasant to hear, they were always honest and straightforward.

The esteem in which Mr. Price was held by law school administrators, as well as by law librarians, brought him many requests to act as a consultant to new or developing libraries. His knowledge of law and of the techniques of library science enabled him to be of inestimable help in evaluating the job being done, in making recommendations for the development of the collection, and in obtaining the budget and staff necessary to reach and maintain high standards. To the faculties and administrations he frequently brought a new dimension to their concepts of law libraries and librarianship, a new awareness of the problems facing the libraries, and a recognition of their responsibility in the solution of those problems.

To his many friends and close associates his professional contributions were but a small part of the man. More important were the characteristics and the incidents of his life so closely identified with him. An independent and resourceful person, he earned his own way from the time he was 12—through high school, the University of Chicago, and the University of Illinois Library School, as well as through law school at Columbia. Some of Mr. Price's fine qualities are revealed in one of Miss Elliott's favorite stories, the story of an early trip that he and Mrs. Price took. They greatly needed a vacation but did not have much money to spend. Mr. Price bought one regular fare on the night boat on Lake Michigan and gave it to his wife, while he worked his way as a deck hand. Sometimes as he worked he would look up to the passenger deck and see her standing there

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** The information collected and the advice given by Miss Elliott were major contributions to the writing of this tribute.

looking down on him with a smile on her face. Miss Elliott said, "There was not a dry eye in the room when he finished by saying that he thought that in the afterlife it might be just this way."

His sense of humor was often directed toward himself. When he opened the first institute at Los Angeles, he read a letter from his wife in which she told him to "speak up, talk along

fast, and stand up straight."

In a recent letter to Miss Elliott, Mrs. Price wrote "It was a privilege to live alongside of a mind of such courage and integrity, a mind of such fortitude and tenacity, so able and kind. 'Like a tall pine blown down by the wind, leaves a great vacancy.'" His friends and colleagues also say it was indeed a privilege to have known him.