

## Miles Oscar Price

By ERVIN H. POLLACK\*

In an age when form has dominated substance and judgment has been subservient to expediency, the average man has been busily engaged in fulfilling his self-interest and in satisfying his pragmatic ends. However, some dedicated and social-minded individuals have, by thought and deed, made other contributions to our society, thus ameliorating and enhancing it. Miles Price was among those select persons.

Miles Price's social temperament was revealed in many ways, notably through his supreme dedication to work and through his selfless interest in others. He manifested the latter interest through his strong attachment to his students, past and present, and through his concern for them, which he daily expressed by overt act or by word of endorsement or encouragement. His students reciprocated this feeling, sharing a rare bond of respect, loyalty, and affection for him. Thus, his passing transcends any professional loss. We, who knew Miles and shared happy hours with him, loved him with a fervidness which is unique, complex, and indescribable. Hence, we feel this parting deeply and personally.

To us, he was more than a teacher; he was a dear friend with whom we could share our innermost thoughts, hopes, and aspirations. Often, like a fairy godmother, he would help bring the latter to pass. His solicitude, which he could express without embarrassment to himself or to the recipient, was poignant. This concern extended even to the simple pleasures of life, such as his taking a poor student, who could ill afford it, to a baseball game.

We accepted his professional competence but admired and loved him most for his uninhibited goodness. However, it was not a goodness artificially contrived or fatuously offered. It was genuine—soul-deep—and encompassed the man. He possessed an endless supply of kindness, which he distributed and shared without fan or favor. Thus, we were frequently graced with his benefactions, sometimes without our knowledge. I learned years after I attended Columbia Library School that he forcefully defended me before its dean when I was a student, because

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I challenged a philosophic thesis projected in class by an instructor. He lamented the placidity of the average library student and encouraged dissent.

As to his own work, he mercilessly applied the highest standard of excellence; but he did not apply this criterion to others. In judging others, he displayed boundless compassion and endless empathy. I recall his defending associates when they were criticized—sometimes justly—for some artless professional contribution or tactless act. Perhaps his personal tribulations and tragedies molded him into the gentle, considerate, affectionate man he was.

This kindness was Miles' trademark. I recall the first time I met him, which was at a meeting of the Association of American Law Schools in Chicago in 1938. We had prearranged a meeting. I arrived on time at the meeting place, an area in the lobby of the hotel that was crowded with chatting law professors, and I was at a loss to identify Mr. Price. I stopped a distinguished-looking gentleman and asked him if he knew Miles Price and would point him out to me. The man answered, "Yes, he's in that crowd," identifying some gentlemen who were deeply engrossed in conversation. "He's the meanest looking man in that group, but don't be deceived by that. He's the kindest man here." Then he walked on before I could learn his name or thank him. Soon a lean, sandy-haired man with shaggy, "John L. Lewis" eyebrows and a strong, protruding chin moved towards me. I introduced myself, and he responded with a friendly, crinkly grin and a warm, crackling hello, which could not disguise his midwestern origin. I relaxed, for I sensed that Miles Price would be a friend.

As a young man, he revealed the extent of his tenacious determination when doctors informed him that, because of a physical disability, he would have to discontinue work. With a young bride to support and a career in the offing, he doggedly refused to accept their prognosis. A lesser person would have accepted the medical decision. The rest is history. Miles' full career is a testimony not only to his accomplishments, but also to his exceptionally strong personality.

In his work, Miles displayed two very dominant characteristics—supreme competence and

tenacity of purpose. He undertook the tedious assignment with a deliberateness few men possess, transforming the unpleasant into a challenge. He approached each problem meticulously, borne of superior training and assured self-discipline. His work, therefore, consistently received and merited highest commendation. He distinguished himself as an academician although he modestly denied himself this appellation. Through his zeal, he excited others into emulating him and extended his influence into the reaches of an ever-devoted army of disciples.

As an administrator, he gave members of his staff full opportunity to grow professionally and to develop their talents. He fostered their independence when he thought the time was right, being careful how he cut the umbilical cord. It would have been easier on him if he had pursued a different policy and had had less turnover on his staff. But this would have conflicted with his basic interest in the development of talent and in the encouragement of people to perform at their best.

Although Miles had climbed to the summit of his profession, he was not content to relax or let events pass him by. Throughout his career,

he was in the forefront of his profession, working on new projects, offering leadership and advice, and engaging in significant association programs. His career, therefore, is a testament to accomplishment and to purposeful living.

No tribute to Miles Price would be complete if it did not include a recognition of Fannie Price and the consummate relationship that she and Miles shared in over a half-century of love and sacrifice. The devotion Miles had for Fannie was equaled only by her love for him. In recent years, this was accentuated by the concern and tender attention each showered upon the other. Their marriage was the poet's dream and the dreamer's odyssey.

Miles' death leaves a void we will never fill; however, the pages of his life contain an important message from which we can draw instruction and comfort: Achievements are best attained through effort purposefully directed; the full bounty of life's riches is acquired through selfless dedication to others. May these direction posts serve us as reminders of the nobility of Miles' spirit and inspire us in the fulfillment of life's dreams.