

Vanderbilt Law Review

Volume 22
Issue 1 *Issue 1 - December 1968*

Article 7

12-1968

Elliott E. Cheatham

John W. Wade

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarship.law.vanderbilt.edu/vlr>



Part of the [Legal Education Commons](#), and the [Legal Writing and Research Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

John W. Wade, Elliott E. Cheatham, 22 *Vanderbilt Law Review* 21 (1968)

Available at: <https://scholarship.law.vanderbilt.edu/vlr/vol22/iss1/7>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Scholarship@Vanderbilt Law. It has been accepted for inclusion in Vanderbilt Law Review by an authorized editor of Scholarship@Vanderbilt Law. For more information, please contact mark.j.williams@vanderbilt.edu.

EEC

*A Knight there was, and that a worthy man
That fro the tyme that he first began
To riden out, he loved chivalrie,
Trouthe and honour, fredon and curteisie. . . .
And though that he was worthy, he was wys,
And of his port as meeke as is a mayde.
He never yet no vileynye ne sayde
In al his lyf unto no manner wight.
He was a verray, parfit gentil knyght.*

—Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, Prologue ll. 43-46, 68-72.

A verray, parfit gentil knight! Was there ever a more apt description of an individual than this is of Elliott Cheatham? It's so apt it's almost a caricature. The angular, erect carriage. The soft and soothing, yet vigorous and resonant voice. The dignity that carries a strong sense of respect of self and others, yet of his port as meeke as is a mayde. The rectitude that one feels from his mere presence, not coming from a sense of self-rightousness, but from a love of truth and honour, fredon¹ and curteisie. The wysdom of a Nestor. The loyalty to institutions and friends, and the moral and physical courage which one would automatically associate with a parfit knyght. The true consideration and innate kindness and gentleness that come from an instinctive sensitivity for the feelings of others. Even the antique spelling seems appropriate. There is an aroma of old-fashionness which makes one think of earlier, less-hurried times and wish that he, too, could grow old in such a gracious fashion. That overworked cliché, a true Southern gentleman, is neither overworked nor cliché when it is applied to him.

Yet all of this is deceptive and misleading. For Elliott Cheatham is a man of young ideas—often radical ones. His thoughts and plans are of the future, and he looks to the past only for the lessons it gives as to how the future can be improved. He thinks always of the “energizing forces of the law.”² He sees the turmoil and vicissitudes of contemporary society as a challenge to the law, the lawyer, and the

1. My edition of Chaucer carries a glossary which defines the word as meaning freedom, or liberality—generosity. I'll accept both meanings.

2. This phrase was taken by him from an article by Harlan F. Stone, when he was U.S. Attorney General. Stone, *The Future of Legal Education*, 10 A.B.A.J. 233, 234 (1924); “Instead

law school, to identify the values in them and find a way for law to produce the orderly change which will capture and utilize those values. He can sternly and firmly prod and redirect the lazy or recalcitrant student, the not-so-productive faculty member, or the lagging dean. At 80, he is presently engaged in writing two books and has plans for a third. He works seven days a week, I don't really know how many hours. This year, for the first time, he is not taking direct responsibility for any courses; we are happy to have agreed on the title of "Research Professor of Law" and to use his talents in various ways.

As a member of the Vanderbilt faculty now for more than a tenth of his life, he has meant much to all of us in the Law School. An outstanding teacher, with unique methods of his own, he prepares thoroughly and completely and always stimulates his students—teaching as much by his example as by what he says. A warm colleague, he is always ready to take time from his work to assist and advise, but never offers advice unless it is sought. An author who writes thoughtfully and after much meditation, he also writes clearly and interestingly, but not quickly or in a prolific fashion. As the days go by, I learn frequently, yet casually, of more individual students with whom he has spent much time in conferring and advising and of additional ways in which he has aided faculty members. On many problems he has given me sage advice—which I have usually taken. I have privately called him the keeper of the dean's conscience.

But the way in which he has been most valuable to me, and perhaps through me to the Law School, is as an idea man. He takes time to meditate, and he uses that time efficiently. He thinks both abstractly and concretely. Many memoranda, always signed "EEC" and always referring to himself in the third person as "EEC," have come to me over the years—usually typed in his own, somewhat erratic, typing and with inserts in his own abominable handwriting. They have been a treasure trove—thought-provoking and often action-inducing. I do wish that I had had the ability and the energy and the perseverance to carry through on more of them. Some of them, of

of dissipating our energies in the vain attempt to master in the brief period of three years the vast and growing mass of technical learning of our profession as an independent and detached system, we must seek a simplification of educational methods by coming closer to those energizing forces which are producing the technical doctrine of the law. We may have to do this by reading a clearer and more accurate understanding of the relation of law to those social functions which it endeavors to control and by studying its rule and doctrines as tools or devices created and placed in the hands of the lawyer as means of effecting that control."

course, were simply to transmit ideas, not to produce action. Many were prepared on specific request; others were volunteered—all with the knowledge that they were welcomed and appreciated.

As long as he remains in the dean's office, JWW fervently hopes that the memoranda from EEC will keep coming.

JOHN W. WADE*

* Dean, Vanderbilt University School of Law