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George Dession

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was an avid student of the mechanics and dynamics of society in all of its phases.

But Dession was more than a scholar and a student. He was a warm, passionate, intensely human man. The object of his devotion was not merely knowledge. It was man: the individual seeking to live in the overwhelming complexity of his past and present and future. Dession therefore applied himself to the mastery of the little that we know about the individual, which is largely embedded in the morass of the social sciences and medicine. He sought to learn the sources and causes of the individual's conduct, his thoughts, his emotions, his aspirations, the poetry of his life, and the hard facts of his living. He became, I think, our leading legal expert in the field of psychiatry.

It is fortunate that some of Dession's vast knowledge and understanding was reduced to writing in his remarkable case-book, in speeches and articles, and in the startlingly original, but incomplete, draft of a code of sanctions for the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. Dession's untimely death is an irreparable loss. We can only hope that there are those who will carry forward his work with comparable boldness and dedication.

ABE FORTAS
District of Columbia Bar;
Member Arnold, Fortas & Porter

GEORGE DESSION

The untimely death of George Dession has left a void in the ranks of thinkers in the field of Criminal Law that it will indeed be very hard to fill.

Never deceived by the familiar *cliches* and shopworn arguments about the need of repressive punishment to "vindicate the law", Dession sought honestly and fearlessly for its *raison d'etre* as related to the causes and remedies of anti-social behavior. He was a creative student of the role of psychiatry and cultural anthropology in the understanding of human motivation and misconduct. His casebook, *Criminal Law Administration and Public Order*, is distinguished by stimulating originality. Widely and wisely read, he wrote with a grace refreshingly different from the involved circumlocutions too frequently characteristic of "prosy lawyers".

Above all, he had an eagerly and honestly open mind, which made it a delight to discuss problems with him. This was especially evident in the deliberations of the advisory committee of the Supreme Court in respect to rules of crim-

IN MEMORIAM GEORGE H. DESSION

inal procedure and of the American Law Institute in connection with the model penal code.

His intellectual influence will long endure.

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THE SCHOLARSHIP OF PROFESSOR GEORGE DESSION

Twenty-five years ago, when George Dession began to teach criminal law, that subject was not regarded as an "important" course in law school circles. An explanation of this attitude could be given in terms of the dominant mores in the United States concerning property and commerce. In any case, the consequences of this attitude were much more serious than the neglect of a particular course. For the neglect of criminal law also represented the narrow vocationalism of legal education, since the study of criminal law had long included various phases of philosophy and social science.

The status of criminal law in most law school curricula today is a vast improvement over the situation a quarter of a century ago; and Professor Dession was one of the small group of scholars who brought about this change. If this achievement is evaluated with reference to the progress of legal education in the United States, one may appreciate the kind of scholarship in which Professor Dession excelled and reach the core of his thinking.

While many were hospitable to cultural legal study and there was considerable speculation about methodology, there was very little work in the interrelation of law and non-legal disciplines which equalled the standards of the best traditional legal scholarship. Professor Dession's contributions demonstrated what could and ought to be done in university law schools. He proved that legal scholars can master non-legal disciplines and thereby increase our understanding of law in ways which traditional scholarship left untouched.

Let me cite two instances. Professor Dession had a thorough grasp of psychiatry and his essays on the relations of that discipline to criminal law are illuminating contributions. In one of these essays—*Psychiatry and the Conditioning of Criminal Justice**—written seventeen years ago, Professor Dession pointed out

* 47 YALE L. J. 319.