

BOOK REVIEWS

LAW IN ACTION. Edited by Amicus Curiae. Crown Publishers, New York. 498 pages.

"The legal arena is a complicated scene—an entangled institution; a labyrinth of subtleties; hairline distinctions coated with the circumstances of time, person, place and thing; of wisdom; of confusion." (*Heraclitus of Ephesus*, 500 B.C.)

"... of confusion." Thus is the law looked upon by laymen and lawyers-to-be, thus is the profession of law practised by Filipino lawyers.

To counteract this prejudice, to remove this blot from a noble profession, we must re-orientate ourselves about law and its purposes, its basis and its end. We must "re-learn" to appreciate it.

Appreciation of law comes naturally when we know and realize the role it plays in society, the vital points in human affairs that it touches, and the 'magic wand' that it offers to the oppressed.

Appreciation of law comes easily when the presentation of the subject is made humorous, and even "quipsical" and boisterous without, however, for a moment losing sight of the law's underlying principles and philosophy.

Law in Action, an anthology of the Law in Literature, edited by Amicus Curiae, is a book that attempts to leave a sweet taste in the mouth, and a half-smile on the face dispelling all pessimism about the uselessness of law and its being "a government of the living by the dead".

Roscoe Pound, formerly Dean of the Harvard Law School, introduces the book. He explains why law makes such an interesting subject, why it is often the topic of conversation among laymen, why "the playwright and the writer of fiction turn to them (lawyers) constantly." However, he warns us that when the application of law is treated in novels, stories or moving pictures, we must bear in mind that the author, by the exigencies of his story, may require the law to be fitted to them.

The book is arranged in four parts, Liberty, Morals, Crime and Justice. The first trial reported in the book is, appropriately enough, the railroading of Jesus Christ to his death as reported by the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. This episode is justly assessed as a dark and shameful one for here was a judgment visited on a man to pacify the clamor of a whimsical populace.

The overnight trial between "The Devil and Daniel Webster" is a mystic story but, like a fairy tale, impresses us with the truth and lesson it imparts. A good lawyer after all is not only he who has a glib tongue but also he who has an incandescent flame for truth in his heart, ever lighted to ward off the dark gropings of hell. Here we learn that truly, "the final test (of a lawyer) ... is battle in some form... it is one thing to utter a happy phrase from a protected cloister, another to think under fire—to think for action upon which great interests depend."

Not all the stories in this book are in the serious vein however. The story on "A Question of Citizenship" is penned in a matter-of-fact way, teasingly and disarmingly. "Sancho Panza's Decision of Three Disputes" is, to say the least, a delightful piece of mock satire. In "My Father Goes to Court" the reader is likely to find it hard suppressing a chuckle, as he follows or tries to follow, the episodes of this unbelievable suit concerning 'theft'. The "Trial of the Knave of Hearts" is intended to charm the horror-bent reader.

The 43 stories contained in this book are an attempt to span the breath and sound the depth of the law in literature. To say that the attempt is wholly unsuccessful would perhaps neither be truthful nor fair. For in these stories are liberally scattered colorful courtroom scenes, excellently interpreted, and brilliant examples of the art of cross-examination, the amusing tricks, the queer quirks of a showman's profession, the impassioned appeals of the earnest barrister, etc., in fine, the unique drama and the rich comedy of the law. The book becomes more valuable in that it is illuminating reading not only for lawyers and lawyers-to-be, but also, and perhaps especially, for ordinary laymen. For all men alike enjoy a battle of wits, a contest of reason and emotion, a duel of the spirit and the flesh, particularly when the motive underlying it all is that ever-changing though never-ending struggle for justice.