

Mr. Taft's Papers

LEGAL MISCELLANIES. *Six Decades of Changes and Progress.* By Henry W. Taft. New York: The Macmillan Company. 1941. 218 pp., with index. \$3.

Reviewed by JAMES REID PARKER

LIKE certain other good American essayists, Henry W. Taft writes too little, possibly because he has devoted a good part of his long life to being an extremely busy lawyer. But occasionally he assembles enough material for a book, and now, at eighty-two, he has done so again. The book is a random assortment of papers with the covering title "Legal Miscellanies," and it is very good. I regret to say that Mr. Taft's fellow-lawyers will constitute his chief audience on this occasion, for the author's favorite theme, an improved leadership of the bar, which recurs continually and gives the book its flavor, is admittedly a special one. My regret derives from the fact that there is in Mr. Taft's work a reasonableness of thought and a precision of expression that are in themselves admirable. Civilized prose is not yet a surplus commodity. Non-lawyers who combine an interest in the general field of law with a fondness for expository writing of a superior order will perhaps afford Mr. Taft a second audience. At least, one hopes so.

In his preface Mr. Taft says, taking a leaf from Disraeli, "I hope that what I have written may entitle me to be classified, not as a Pedant, but as a Miscellanist, 'since Pedants will always be read by Pedants, and the Miscellanists by the tasteful, the volatile, and the amiable.'" This disclaimer, which Christopher Morley must surely have been hoarding for his own use one day, is Mr. Taft's modest way of saying that he does not propose to write an autobiography nor yet a history of the New York bar, but a series of good-tempered, digressive essays seasoned, at least, with these ingredients.

Of the thirteen chapters, the ones I like best are "Procedure in the Courts," "Law and the Sciences," "The Anti-Trust Law," and "The Bar of New York and Some of its Leaders in the Past." A chapter called "Jewish Lawyers in New York," statistical rather than emotional, is an interesting recapitulation of surveys that bar associations have conducted among their memberships, and Gentile and Jewish lawyers alike will approve of the manner in which the material is handled. Another, "Will Making," is an entertaining compendium of legal trifling distinctions and other quiddi-



Henry W. Taft

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ties, accompanied by Mr. Taft's tart and instructive observations.

"Legal Miscellanies" is the first book to quote generously from the recent "Holmes-Pollock Letters." I take it as further evidence of the classic quality of that correspondence that Mr. Taft, instead of using passages that the first commentators happily declared would be historic, borrows others, which stand up equally well. It is refreshing to find that while Mr. Taft peppers his text with many excellent quotations from this and other sources, he has an aversion to footnotes and includes relatively few. "Legal Miscellanies" is a first-rate illustration of how easily material ordinarily footnoted (almost always, in fact, in works of this sort) can be woven into the main matter of a book if the author will take the trouble to operate his loom properly. To Mr. Taft, as to Frank Sullivan, a footnote is not a lovesome thing. This reviewer is grateful.

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ANSWERS TO LITERARY QUIZ

1. Browning: "Home Thoughts from Abroad."
2. Bryant: "Thanatopsis."
3. Byron: "The Prisoner of Chillon."
4. Chaucer: "The Canterbury Tales."
5. Coleridge: "Christabel."
6. Fitzgerald: "The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam."
7. Goldsmith: "The Deserted Village."
8. Gray: "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard."
9. Henley: "Invictus."
10. Keats: "Endymion."

Texas Cattle

THE LONGHORNS. By J. Frank Dobie. Boston: Little, Brown & Co. 1941. 388 pp., with index. \$3.50.

Reviewed by EDWIN L. SABIN

BY its title "The Longhorns" might be a hard-riding "Western" of the cow country. In large measure so it is, but with Mr. Dobie as the producer we are assured of a theme more substantial than one of fiction: another work by him in his established field of Southwestern lore, exploring again a regional past become legendary. This present contribution is the history, done by phases, of the valiant old-time Texas Longhorn cattle, the foundation of the beef business in the West, and the nubbin of the romance connected with it; and, naturally, of the practices of those other valiants, pioneer settlers, and riders of brush and trial who experienced the peculiarities of the brutes.

These rangy Longhorns which, with their spread of four, six, even eight feet of needle-sharp tips, were the animals that, in the period of the great beef drives north, early thronged the trails. By Mr. Dobie's account they were descendants of the "black cattle," the Moorish fierce, sharp-horned, bull-ring stock, introduced into the Southwest by the Spaniard from Mexico; and of the subsequent domestic cattle brought into Texas by the immigrating settlers from the United States.

The "black cattle" as transported and as escaped from custody or abandoned to the marauding Indians took to the brush and multiplied prodigiously; the Texas domestic cattle mingled with them; the milder strain was eclipsed. The result was a distinct breed, the Longhorn, an animal exemplifying the survival of the fittest: one built to cruise a wild and treacherous land, and by ready adaptation to environments enabled to exact not only tolerance but the tribute of a living from it.

These Longhorns—of which a few, like the buffalo, are maintained upon preserves—not only served the whites of Southwest ranch and range as the buffalo did the plains Indians, but they comprised a commercial proposition on a large scale. Onward from its expository opening, Mr. Dobie's chronicle is a story as active as any Western fiction, for by his own knowledge of the things that were, and by the testimony of men who rode with rope and gun, he presents a prodigal assortment of news and information upon the habits and the handling (at discretion) of those unfenced, Longhorn millions.

The Saturday Review

Words into Meaning

SEMANTICS: The Nature of Words and Their Meaning. By Hugh Walpole. New York: W. W. Norton & Co. 1941. 264 pp., with index. \$2.50.

Reviewed by ERNEST RICHARD MOORE

WITH the publication of Mr. Walpole's book on semantics, this young discipline is brought anew to the attention of the general reader and the student. Since C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards wrote their famous work on the meaning of words, many writers have taken hold of the subject and tried to popularize its teachings. They failed, by and large, because their grasp was not as strong as their purpose. Walpole, fortunately, comes better prepared for the task. He has long been associated with the Orthological Institute headed by Ogden in Cambridge, England, and, in addition, has for his guidance the practical experience of teaching languages in this country and in Canada. More, then, can be expected of him.

Owing its existence to the works of Ogden and Richards, as the author frankly admits, "Semantics" offers little new material. However, "The Meaning of Meaning" and other relevant works on how words come to have significance are presented here in a needed simplification. The special senses of sign, symbol, and context are explored, the routes of definition defined, and the metaphor unravelled. The familiar triangle of reference serves to make clear the central processes in referential language, wherein a word is the sign of a thought making reference to a thing.

In his chapter on Fictions, Walpole revives old solutions and makes them more effective by introducing a new kind of English to deal with abstractions. Jeremy Bentham, more than a hundred years ago, as Ogden has shown elsewhere, had discovered satisfactory ways of dealing with such fictions as "beauty," "democracy," "as," and so on. One, the less feasible, he called "archtypation," which consisted of finding a typical and lucid experience taken from reality to exemplify the core meaning of the abstract word in question. The other, more practical, got at the meaning of the fiction through restatement in simple language. The question arises as to how we can accurately determine whether the language of translation is any simpler (that is, freer from misleading fictions) than standard English. The answer, in part at least, is given by Basic English, which Walpole presents as an easily acquired supplementary tongue. This primary language sug-

gested by Bentham and worked out by C. K. Ogden, not only makes possible the translation of all other words in the English language, but also, because of its limited grammar and vocabulary (850 basic English words and certain derivatives) permits a close scrutiny and familiarity with the terms of definition. Basic English, hailed before the present World War as an ideal international language, at present employed as an introductory step in the teaching of fuller English, may, with the enthusiastic propagation of the Ogden-Richards school, conceivably reach the philosophers and provide them with a language by means of which they can keep in common touch with the people. Meanwhile, the people best can employ it to explode the fictions of false prophets.

The worth of Walpole's book lies in

his simple presentation of a hitherto abstruse subject. By simple is not meant easy. An admirable feature of the book is the opportunity afforded for thinking the various aspects of semantics through to agreement or to opposition. Richards rightly remarks, in his introduction to the book, that the reader's gain is in the processes to which he is stirred and not in any product served to him.

Whether one agrees with Hugh Walpole or not about the many benefits which the study of semantics entails—we ascribe his overstatements to the enthusiasm of a good teacher—it must be admitted that he makes theoretical considerations have practical outcomes and that he makes his meanings clear. That this can be said of a semantician is no little praise for the method he employs.

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Esthetic Experience

THE NEW CRITICISM. By John Crowe Ransom. Norfolk, Connecticut: New Directions. 1941. 339 pp. with index. \$2.50.

Reviewed by ALEXANDER COWIE

JOHN CROWE RANSOM has written a provocative and useful, if not completely satisfactory, book about "The New Criticism." What is old and what is new in criticism he nowhere tells us explicitly, but he makes us feel before he is through that the new criticism is distinguished by its attempt, with the aid of psychology, to make an extremely intimate analysis of the nature of esthetic experience and of the technique of producing such experience. This newness he tries to bring home to the reader by reviewing and evaluating the work of four of his contemporaries, I. A. Richards, T. S. Eliot, Yvor Winters, and William Empson. In a last chapter, entitled "Wanted: An Ontological Critic," he advertises for his man without final success and must temporarily (and modestly) fill the position himself.

The author takes I. A. Richards as the type of "psychological critic." He grants that Richards has been a beneficial agent in the liberation of criticism from purely factual considerations, but he cannot be wholly at ease with an "anti-intellectual esthetician" who so readily assents to the virtual separation of the emotional from the cognitive elements in esthetic experience. T. S. Eliot comforts the author by his lucid state-

ment of the connections between esthetics and the history of criticism. Yet Mr. Ransom cannot hold with Eliot's merging of thought and feeling into a "single unified experience." The two must exist together but may be viewed separately: that seems to be Mr. Ransom's view. For, finally, Mr. Ransom "can see no necessity for waiving the intellectual standards on behalf of poets. . . . If Shelley's argument is foolish, it makes his poetry foolish." In Yvor Winters, who seems temperamentally more congenial to the author, he finds a dubious insistence upon "moralism" but a wholesome emphasis upon "logical structure." William Empson is represented as an extraordinarily acute critic whose treatment of "ambiguity" seems revolutionary to Mr. Ransom.

All the matters which fall under consideration in this book are, to use the author's phrase, "copiously discussible." One must add that in the present volume they are not always readily assimilable. The reasons are two. First, Mr. Ransom attempts not a treatise but a series of essays. Second, the author's statements, though often intuitively shrewd, are not sufficiently clear and coherent. The book has an air of charming but somewhat indolent improvisation; it sheds a good deal of light but fails to focus it. Its value lies not in its judgments, which are sometimes extravagant and erratic, but in its many fine aperçus and in various unallocated comments on the poetic method. As always, Mr. Ransom here proves himself a sensitive student of poetry.