

Uncommon Law: Being 66 Misleading Cases



Synopsis

Absurdities of English law are illustrated in 66 satirical essays that are thought-provoking and amusing. Some of the cases presented, no matter how ridiculous, are still studied today. There is the famous case of Albert Haddock, who wrote out a check to the Collector of Taxes on a cow. Then there is the case of Mr. and Mrs. Pratt, who, although happily married, got divorced in order to pay less income tax. This book will teach more about legal proceedings than most lawyers know, provided the reader can stop laughing long enough to learn.

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Customer Reviews

Although these 66 humorous essays were written 80 years ago in another land, some of A.P. Herbert's themes maintain their relevance today. Particularly his bitter campaign against England's (but not, as he was always careful to note, Scotland's) divorce laws. Divorce is a thriving legal business in America today, but only because of the ingenuity of aggrieved spouses; there are not, I conceive, any legal philosophical issues of note. However, many of Herbert's points can easily be recast into the same-sex marriage debate. Herbert, trained in law, wrote for Punch as the Victorian (and earlier) legal ideas were giving way, reluctantly, to modernism in England. Not a questioner of class values, he did not touch the kind of political-legal issues that, say, Claud Cockburn was ventilating in *The Week*. A novelist by profession, Herbert was more interested in social norms. In one of the first of his "Misleading Cases," he asks whether an Englishman has the right to jump off a (low) bridge just because he feels like it. Constable Boot (one of a cast of recurring characters) thinks not though he cannot quite say why. Albert Haddock, who ought to be as well known as

Colonel Blimp or Mr. Polly, thinks so. Haddock spends much of his time duelling with tax collectors, but the more interesting essays are about regulations of personal conduct: drinking hours, marriage, publishing. It is not easy to state briefly why these essays are funny. They are so in the low-key Punchian way; in an early essay, Herbert has a judge refer to a reasonable man as "this excellent but odious character."

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