

Book Review: Great Issues in Private Courts, by Rupert Furneaux

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Great Issues in Private Courts. By RUPERT FURNEAUX. (Kimber & Co.: London: 1964) pp. 164.

Students who would heed the advice of the realist and sociological jurists to see what the courts are doing in fact would be foolish to read this book: it is much too funny for such serious fellows.

The author canvasses a series of cases in the domestic tribunals of the church, the medical and the legal professions and produces enough off-beat and off-colour material to launch a dozen soap operas.

In the eccentricity sweepstakes, the churchmen clearly lead the field. Archdeacon Wakeford and Reverend Harold Davidson were each defrocked for carrying on missionary work of a very peculiar sort. While the former's activities were confined to a single escapade, the latter styled himself the "Prostitutes' Padre". The account of the adventures leading up to his defrocking is predictable, but his post-trial conduct makes somewhat startling reading:

No longer a clergyman, Davidson set out on his parade of protest which brought him first to Blackpool where he exhibited himself on the pier in a barrel as thousands of sniggering sightseers, each paying twopence, filed past. On one day eleven thousand people paid admission and Davidson was reputed to be earning £500 a week. He and the showman were charged with obstruction and Davidson was fined £4. He moved

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into a glass-panelled cabinet on which was affixed a notice: 'I am determined to fast until death'. An automatic demon prodded him with a fork. His threat led to his being charged with attempted suicide and, when the charge was dismissed, he was awarded £382 in damages for false imprisonment

The end came on 28th July, 1937. For three weeks Davidson entered the lions' cage at an amusement park in Skegness. There he preached and protested his innocence. He became more and more excited, striding up and down, waving his arms. Stepping backwards, he trod on the lioness' tail. Her mate, Fred, reared up and pawed him, striking him down and mauling him before the tamer, a sixteen-year-old girl named Rene Somner, could get into the cage and drag him out by the collar. Bleeding and badly lacerated, Davidson was still conscious.

'What is the time?' he asked the horror-stricken crowd. When he was told it was 3.30 p.m., he exclaimed: 'Ah, I'm in time to make the front pages of the evening papers'—a remark which goes far to explain his oddities.

By contrast, the lawyers are a dull lot: F. J. de Verteuil—disbarred for fraud; Patrick Marrinan—disbarred for consorting with criminals for the purpose of obtaining their business; Ben Canter—struck from the roll as a solicitor for fabricating evidence in connection with the trial of one Greech, a Maltese brothel-keeper.

Only the case of one, F. H. Nye, demonstrates the dramatic retribution that lurks in wait for the dishonest solicitor. Nye, who was later struck off the roll for exerting undue influence on a client to procure a benefit under her will, was set upon by a cousin of this same client, Col. Alfred Wintle:

Nye was debagged by Wintle, put into a corner with a dunce's cap on his head, photographed, made to sign a document and write his name on a cheque for £1,000, and thrust into the road—trouserless.

One can read this little book in an hour or two. Look through it from first to last and you will not find a "great issue" anywhere between its covers. But, after all, isn't this a first-rate recommendation to the sober-sided legal reader?