

## BOOK REVIEWS

JUSTICE HOLMES to DR. WU—An intimate correspondence. 1921-1932.  
Central Book Company, Incorporated, New York.

Here is a pamphlet for the collector of Holmesiana. In 58 short pages, the letters to his Chinese friend, Dr. John C. H. Wu, manage to reveal the essential lineaments of the personality of Mr. Justice Holmes. Without the detail of the more abundant Holmes-Laski and Holmes-Pollock letters, the reader will find depicted here the same courtly kindness of the true gentleman, the faith in effort, the epigrammatic style, the tolerance for disapproved ideas, the critical interest in men and books that does not shy at "laboring with a dictionary" through the pages of Spengler's abstruse "Decline of the West" ("a stimulating humbug of a book").

Here, also, are the late Justice's basic pragmatism, his dislike of "speculation *in vacuo*—what I call churning the void to make cheese", the disbelief in absolute values or *a priori* ultimates, that in recent years have been the subject of vigorous attack from certain quarters.

"I don't believe that it is an absolute principle or even a human ultimate that man always is an end in himself—that his dignity must be respected, etc. We march up a conscript with bayonets behind to die for a cause he doesn't believe in. And I feel no scruples about it. Our morality seems to me only a check on the impulse of every pig to put his feet in the trough. When the Germans in the late war disregarded what we called the rules of the game, I don't see there was anything to be said except: we don't like it and shall kill you if we can. So when it comes to the development of a corpus juris the ultimate question is what do the dominant forces of the community want and do they want it hard enough to disregard whatever inhibitions may stand in the way."

But despite the tough non-humanitarian attitude, the octogenarian Justice could listen appreciatively to the views of a 22-year old student of law, alien in race and traditions. It certainly is a measure of the man.

Withal, reading the letters of only one of the correspondents is very much like listening to another's telephone conversation. Interest is aroused and curiosity not satisfied. Unverifiable references abound, ideas are left incomplete, and the total effect is a feeling of frustration. This result is heightened by the evolution of the feelings of Justice Holmes for his correspondent as traced by the letters. Starting from the polite graciousness of a gentleman of 80 towards a young stranger four times his junior, interest quickly deepened into esteem and ripened into a real friendship that bred genuine concern for Dr. Wu's safety in the troubled China of the late twenties. The steady progress from "My dear Mr. Wu" to "My dear Wu" makes the omission of Dr. Wu's letters a matter to be deplored. For Dr. Wu was no mean intellect himself: a Dean of the China School of Comparative Law, President of the Shanghai Provisional Court, Adviser of his Country's delegation at the San Francisco Conference, law writer of note, his ideas and views on law and life could not be devoid of interest even in the intimacy of private correspondence. The reader's perusal of the present collection inevitably ends in a conviction that a more complete edition, giving in full the letters of both parties, should be undertaken as "a consummation devoutly to be wish'd".

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