

## BOOK REVIEWS

STARTING IN PRACTICE: A GUIDE FOR ARTICLED CLERKS AND TRAINEE  
LEGAL EXECUTIVES. By ROGER BIRD. [London: Sweet & Maxwell  
1984. 163 pp. Limp: S\$16.70.]

### *Chapter Headings*

1. Introduction
2. The Solicitors' Office
3. Costs
4. Litigation I—Debt Collecting
5. Litigation II (general advice on litigation)
6. Litigation III (matrimonial and criminal proceedings)
7. Conveyancing
8. Wills and Probate
9. Dealing with the Business Client
10. Drafting
11. Conclusions and Afterthoughts

### *Comments*

PROBABLY in no other profession is the tyro turned loose on the world with as little practical training as the newly-qualified lawyer. In theory the graduate, clutching his degree scroll, is professionally competent the moment he leaves law school. On top of the four years that he has spent in the University, he has to undergo a three-month full time postgraduate Practice Law Course plus six months reading in the chambers of an advocate and solicitor who has been in practice for five out of the seven preceding years. In theory he should at the end of this period be more than capable of tackling the challenges of practice.

Reality is a little different. Many law graduates at the time they are admitted to the Bar are just barely capable of handling a simple case. This is not a denigration of their quality. It is just that there is so much to learn, in such a short space of time.. Moreover, the pressures of practice being what they are, even the most conscientious of masters can barely give enough attention to his pupils to ensure that those pupils are thoroughly familiar with the practical aspects of the law. If ever there was a profession where the beginner is thrown in at the deep end to learn to swim, law is it.

If one defines education as the systematized acquisition of experience, it is patently clear that most of the learning that a law graduate imbibes does not further his education. All too often what passes for legal education is merely a transfer of information. Legal textbooks

are regrettably the main offenders in this respect. This book is however a pleasant exception to the rule, in that the author is not transferring information, but rather sharing his experience.

This is an eminently practical book. You will not find impressive footnotes in it. You will not find a lengthy table of cases. You will not find a massive index. But packed into its 130-odd pages is an immense store of practical experience for the benefit of the beginner.

What this book contains is that basic information that every law graduate is *assumed* to possess. Often the pupil in chambers hesitates to ask a basic question, for fear of seeming foolish. This book answers most of those basic questions. Has anyone explained to you the mechanics of taxation of costs? Did anyone tell you how to bill clients? Were you advised on how to deal with eccentric clients? When was the last time your master explained to you when to ask for security for disbursements? Most pupils have some vague idea of what is going on. This book may help dissipate the fog somewhat. Indeed, it could just as well have been titled "Everything You Wanted to Know About Practice But Were Afraid to Ask".

Although written primarily with English solicitors in mind, this book is nevertheless relevant to practice in Singapore. Much of what is said applies equally here, fused profession notwithstanding. The only exceptions are those parts dealing with criminal law and legal aid. Otherwise, the work is eminently useful and written in a lively, readable style. It should be a "must" for every intending lawyer.