

TOPOLSKI'S LEGAL LONDON with text by Francis Cowper and Foreword by the Right Honourable the Lord Birkett. [Published for 'The Lawyer' by Stevens and Sons Limited. 1961. xi and 76 pp. and one double plate (in colour) and 14 single plates (in colour). £3-13-6.]

There has been a remarkable reluctance on the part of the pictorial *reporteur* to comment on the legal scene. France has had her Daumier, England her 'Spy' and Ardizzone — but apart from these few names, notable draughtsmen have given the law and its personnel a wide berth. In an effort to ensure that justice is to be seen being done where so much of it is actually done, *The Lawyer* has enlisted the services of Mr. Feliks Topolski to portray certain aspects of the English Law in London. On the whole the artist has responded nobly to this challenge and most of his drawings capture the peculiar atmosphere of the profession and its institutions. About several of the fifteen plates there is a hint of the authoritative fluidity of movement for which the younger Dufy demonstrated an unrivalled talent. [See particularly the double plate, pp. 2, 3, and plates facing, p. 16 and p. 62.] Perhaps the most stimulating in this respect is 'Temple Fountain Court', where economy of line and subdued colour washes combine to depict quiet foreground animation beneath a sky whose heaviness is borne patiently by tall, mellow-bricked buildings. The same restrained treatment evokes all the congenial urbanity of a solicitor interviewing clients in his Gray's Inn office [facing p. 46]. More elaborately executed, though no less convincing, is the untitled portrait of a barrister [facing p. 22]: this is not *any* barrister, but one from whose comportment the artist has skilfully extracted that quality of sanguine expectation which sometimes goes with an insupportable case. Mr. Topolski frequently injects an engaging humour into his drawings and nowhere is this more evident than in his portrayal of well-known members of the Bench and Bar. Many striking likenesses emerge, of which a few are perhaps more frank than flattering!

In an approach of the nature employed by this artist it is essential for him to appreciate the slender line which separates caricature from that degree of hyperbole which is still compatible with the definition of character. Unfortunately, Mr. Topolski does not share the ubiquitous Ronald Searle's flair for being able to operate comfortably on either side of the line, and his occasional dealings with the

marvellous are responsible for his least distinguished plates [*viz.*, those facing pp. 26, 36, 42, 58 and 72]. Nowhere is this weakness more apparent than in his sole adventure (in this volume) with the medium of oil paint, in the somewhat allegorical "Trial by Jury" [facing p. 72],—an unsubtle composition in which authenticity is drowned in a deluge of melodramatic hues.

Mr. Francis Cowper's accompanying commentary is polished, historically accurate and tinged with a whimsicality which is as much part of the legal scene as the persons and things he describes. The Preface informs us that the text and the plates were produced independently, but they nevertheless serve each other in a practical and unselfconscious way.

By no means the least virtue of this handsome and readable volume is its measurements (15" long x 10" high), which should prevent it from being consigned to oblivion in all but the most uneconomically constructed bookcase. Its proper home is some place where it can be picked up as fancy decrees and opened for an hour's gentle browsing.