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Book Reviews

HANDBOOK OF THE LAW OF BILLS AND NOTES. By William E. Britton. West

Publishing Co.: St. Paul, 1943. xx:1245.

Certainly a primary aim of the administration of justice is simplicity and certainty of law. The law of negotiable papers has developed more successfully in this regard than most fields; very happily so, for certainty is particularly desirable in commercial matters. We are almost approaching the millennium of law administration in which lawyers are unnecessary. Nine-tenths of the law of negotiable instruments consists of rules satisfactorily mastered by the bankers and business men who must use them daily. The remaining tenth is extraordinarily difficult.

Until the publication of Professor Britton's hornbook we have had no good text on the subject. Story's pioneer American treatment was noteworthy for its day, but subsequent editions attempted little more than to bring the citations to date. Other writers have failed to appreciate the uneven degrees of complexity in their subject and if their treatment of the myriad technical, well settled rules supplied the merchant with the necessary information, they created an illusory certainty and simplicity on the points of real interest to the lawyer. It is noteworthy that the biggest problem of modern negotiable instruments law—the impact of the uniform statute on the case law, and the construction and correlation of the several sections of the statute—has been conspicuously neglected. Without doubt, the best writing on negotiable instruments has been in the law reviews, where the author could without embarrassment develop in detail an analysis of a small segment of the field. To this literature Professor Britton has himself been a substantial contributor and he has drawn freely from this source in many of his chapters.

The Handbook series, more familiarly known as the Hornbooks, is intended primarily as a pedagogical aid to students, and the treatment of the various subjects is necessarily limited. However, many of the more recent items in the series embody the highest scholarship and in this class belongs the book here reviewed. Despite the facts that it is essentially a student's handbook and that the subject does not lend itself to compression or, if the entire field is covered, to uniform treatment, it is so distinctly the best book in Negotiable Instruments available that no library which makes any pretensions to completeness can omit it.

ORRIN B. EVANS

