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Book Review

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Book Review

FREEDOM IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY. By Samuel Eliot Morison. Boston: Atlantic-Little, Brown and Company, 1956. Pp. viii, 156. \$3.50.

While this book is not a legal treatise, it is well deserving of a place on the lawyer's reading list. As may be expected, Professor Morison approaches his subject from the standpoint of the historian.

Professor Morison divides his book into three parts—political freedom, economic freedom, and academic freedom, which is characterized as “youngest of the family, still struggling for general recognition.”

In dealing with political freedom in our contemporary society, the author is concerned primarily with those rights which come under the first amendment of the Constitution of the United States, such as freedom of speech and of the press. These freedoms are examined in the light of such modern developments as the Communist threat, congressional investigations, the Attorney General's list of subversive organizations, and administrative autocracy. Professor Morison is generally critical of the high-handed and hysterical way in which congressional investigations, or as he puts it, “red-hunting” have been conducted and is particularly alarmed about the doctrine of guilt by association. “Of all these trends, this is perhaps the most dangerous to liberty, because it permits publicity-mad inquisitors to blacken the good names of good citizens almost at will.”

Nevertheless Professor Morison does not approve of the British “ostrich method of pretending that no danger exists.” His solution is to give the local Communist parties legal recognition if they show evidence of not following the Cominform party line, *i.e.* of being an American political party and not merely the United States branch of a Russian party. In addition he says that no Communist should be employed in the government or in defense plants, and that each case should be judged on its merits and not be decided on a basis of guilt by association or some other equally abstract touchstone.

Economic freedom is the next subject dealt with by the author. He traces the rise and fall of *laissez faire* in our economy and concludes that in contemporary economic society there is now something between *laissez faire* and collectivism, referred to by Morison as “concentrates.” He applies word concentrates to the huge corporations such as the automobile companies and oil companies which not only affect the lives of millions of Americans by their wealth and ability to control economic destinies, but also the rest of the world through their widespread interests. Morison fears that these super monsters invite more and more government control and thereby may serve to

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weaken our system of private enterprise. Yet he finds that our private enterprise system is strong and that "Most of the second half of the twentieth century lies ahead of us. If a substantial measure of economic freedom is to survive, it will be owing as much to our character and our wisdom as to any external or material influence such as war, technology and the exploitation of natural resources. Only a really Christian commonwealth is capable of preserving freedom; and without freedom, nothing in what we call civilization is worth preserving."

In considering academic freedom, "the newest arrival in the freedom ranks," Professor Morison defines it as a threefold right:

(1) The right of a teacher or researcher in a university or other institution of higher learning to search for the truth in his chosen field; to interpret his findings and communicate his conclusions to students and public; without being penalized or molested by authorities within or without the university.

(2) The right of a student in an institution of higher learning not only to be taught by unfettered instructors but to have access to all data pertinent to the subject of his study, and to be reasonably free from compulsive rules and regulations of a secondary-school nature.

(3) The right of a teacher or researcher to exercise the freedom of speech, writing and association that all other citizens enjoy, without being molested or discharged from his academic position.

Professor Morison goes on to state that the teaching profession first must clean its own house and raise its standards. He makes rather strong comments against certain "professional educators" who have a tendency to put more emphasis on how to teach than on a mastery of what is to be taught. The author would not allow Communists to teach as they cannot possibly believe in academic freedom, being enslaved by the doctrines of Communism and totally lacking in freedom of thought. Finally Morison says that we cannot improve the quality of higher education without a deeper sense of religion than at present pervades American universities. "It is natural that this should be so, since academic freedom is but one of the many freedoms that come from God, who gave us minds that we might rise a little nearer the angels; and without whose grace we are powerless for good."

In the lawyer's ever increasing press of business, it becomes all the more essential for him to read a book such as *Freedom in Contemporary Society* in order to review his heritage as a defender of our freedom. As freedom is more and more beset with adversity, it becomes more and more imperative for its chief protectors to recall the foundations on which it is built. This is a well-written book which deserves reading and study.

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