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An Open Letter to Reed Dickerson

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An Open Letter to Reed Dickerson

SIR NOËL HUTTON*

My dear Reed:

They tell me that you are about to retire from your distinguished office and that they are dedicating to you this issue of the *Indiana Law Journal*. I was offered the opportunity to contribute

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an article, which I should very much have liked to do. But time is short. In one of your works, the draftsman poses the question how long he has to do the job. The answer, you said, was the same as Abe Lincoln's answer to the question of how long a man's legs should be—"Long enough to reach the ground."¹ On this occasion, the ground is uncomfortably close, so I must content myself with writing this brief open personal letter, for which the Board of Editors may perhaps find room at the end of the issue.

I write from 36 Whitehall, the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel of the United Kingdom, where, as it happens, I am presently doing a fair amount of work more than ten years after retiring. May I, in passing, express the hope that you will make better use of the leisure provided by your own retirement. However that may be, this gives me the opportunity to bring best wishes from two colleagues here, namely Henry Rowe, now my third successor in the post of First Parliamentary Counsel, and Terence Skemp, who is just about to retire and take up the post of Counsel to the Speaker. Henry was the first to flush you out, in the course of a sabbatical trip to the United States gathering information about the way you all organise your legislative drafting over there. We have had your successive publications over here since 1956, and I for one have greatly valued and enjoyed them. Terence was instrumental in persuading you to come over here around 1969, I think, in order to preach the gospel to the group of Commonwealth lawyers to whom he and others from here were imparting some theoretical advice and practical instruction on legislative drafting. I vividly remember attending just one session of one hour in which, armed with a little sophisticated machinery, you not only gave them the essential principles to be followed in the production of legislative drafts but also dismantled and reconstructed in accordance with those principles a short Act of Congress. This was a demonstration of virtuosity which really opened my eyes. To you, I suppose, it was run of the mill; but I wondered then and wonder now whether there is anyone who could have matched the performance.

Later on, I in turn engineered your arrival over here to give expert evidence to the Committee on the Preparation of Legislation, presided over by David Renton, now a Peer of the Realm. This was a refreshing experience for us, and I for one was comforted to hear

1. Dickerson, *How to Write a Law*, 31 NOTRE DAME LAW. 26 (1955).

that you found no great difficulty in understanding the language of the British Acts of Parliament, at least when you were familiar with the subject.

This has been a two-way traffic, and I have the warmest recollections of a couple of visits to Bloomington, Indiana, and not least of the National Conference on Federal Legislative Drafting held in Washington, D.C., in 1971, for which you fetched me over. I find it hard to believe that you and I met for the first time as recently as 1966—I feel we are much older friends than that, but the date is taken from your kindly introduction, printed at page 110 of the record of that Conference. This began “I am a little sentimental about this next fellow.” On the eve of your retirement, allow me to say that right back to you. I hope you and Jane will have a splendid time, richly earned as it is.

Yours ever, Noël
