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## Book Review of The Book of Libel; Dangerous Words

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*The Book of Libel.* By Charles Angoff. New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce, 1947. 410 pp. \$7.50.

*Dangerous Words.* By Philip Wittenberg. New York: Columbia University Press, 1947. 335 pp. \$5.00.

Two authors have been inspired almost simultaneously to prepare a guide to the law of libel for writers, editors and publishers—for the whole writing fraternity, in fact, who must by the very nature of their work have at least a layman's knowledge of libel, in their own and in the public interest. Such a work has been long overdue, so that it is by no means crowding the market to have two now appear at once—except for Newell's treatise, last revised in 1924, and Seelman's *Law of Libel and Slander in the State of New York*, published in 1933 and revised with later supplements, the subject of libel has long been without any modern, full-length treatment such as the present studies afford.

Mr. Angoff, who is managing editor of the *American Mercury*, attacks his subject by inventorying, clause by clause, the chief libel statutes of all of the states. He follows this with a compendium of leading libel cases which makes up the rest of his book; unfortunately, after the systematic presentation of the statutes the arrangement of the points his cases seek to illustrate seems unduly jumbled and disorderly. Perhaps it is because he is writing primarily for authors and editors that he neglects to cover more of the details of libel law—these, he may feel, are the concern of the attorney after the writer has gotten himself into trouble. His book is accordingly concerned with defining the most common—and sometimes the most elementary—libel situations which the layman may encounter when he starts writing for publication.

Mr. Wittenberg, a well-known patent and copyright lawyer who

had previously written the authoritative *Protection and Marketing of Literary Property*, has produced a volume which will be equally useful to the layman and to the attorney. He covers in detail the nature and characteristics of libel, the standard defenses and the most speculative subjects of libel of the dead, libel of groups, and the like. He also adds a chapter on the most speculative field of all—radio defamation. Because he has undertaken to write merely a basic guide book rather than a treatise, he has made no exhaustive research of cases; still, in the succinct manner in which he has covered all phases of the subject, he has produced one of the most comprehensive studies of libel in the last two decades.

The two books, in fact, go together strikingly well. The Angoff volume performs a long-needed service in collecting for comparative examination the basic statutory provisions on published defamation. With the Wittenberg volume to provide the necessary comprehensive supplement of case law, part of the gap in time between Newell's 1924 volume and the present has thus been filled.

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