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Dr. Ernst Levy

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DR. ERNST LEVY

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DR. ERNST LEVY

IT IS FITTING that this issue of the Washington Law Review should be dedicated to Dr. Ernst Levy who has just retired from active teaching after serving as a member of the faculty of the University of Washington since 1937. This concludes nearly forty years of law teaching both in Germany and the United States. He has received an appointment as Professor Emeritus at the University and will now devote his entire time to research.

Born in Berlin in 1881, Dr. Levy received his doctorate in law from the University of Berlin in 1906. For several years he served as a judge near Berlin and in 1914 he embarked upon his career of teaching and research, his first teaching position being with his alma mater, the University of Berlin. After an interval of service with the army, Dr. Levy became Professor of Roman and German Law at Frankfort University and subsequently he taught at Freiburg for six years and at Heidelberg for seven years. He was also dean at all three schools. For nine years of this period he was managing editor of the Romanistic Division of the Savigny Journal, the outstanding publication in this field. A recent volume of this Journal, containing articles by leading specialists throughout the world, is dedicated to Dr. Levy. In 1936 he was Walker-Ames Professor of Roman Law at the University of Washington and the following year became a Guggenheim Fellow and then a regular member of the faculty of the University of Washington. As a member of the Law School faculty he has taught courses in Roman Law, Modern Civil Law and Comparative Law, and he has contributed to two volumes of the Washington Law Review.¹

Dr. Levy's chief field of interest and research is legal history of the Ancient World. Most of his books and articles have dealt with Roman

¹ See 13 WASH. L. REV. 291 (1938); 25 WASH. L. REV. 233 (1950).

Law from the Classic time up to Justinian. His first book was published in 1907, a year after he received his doctorate from the University of Berlin. Since that time his research and writing have continued along with his teaching. His publications in the field of Roman Law include a two-volume work on the Concurrence of Actions and Persons in Roman Law, Roman Law of Divorce, Capital Punishment in Rome, Statute and Judge in Roman Criminal Law, Natural Law in Roman Thought, and Vulgarization of Roman Law in the Early Middle Ages. His most recent book, *West Roman Vulgar Law, the Law of Property*, was published in 1951. Dr. Levy plans to follow this with a second volume dealing with the law of contracts and torts in West Roman Vulgar Law, then with a third volume devoted to the law of domestic relations and finally with a volume covering the law of succession and wills. The completed work of four volumes will provide the first exposition ever undertaken of this impressive legal development, inasmuch as the earliest Germanic codifications drew heavily upon this vulgarized Roman law.

Many honors have been received by Dr. Levy during his long and distinguished career as a teacher and a scholar. He was one of three American scholars on whom the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws was conferred by Frankfort University as a part of the celebration of the anniversary of Goethe's birth in 1949. He received the honorary degree of Doctor of Philosophy from Heidelberg University in the same year. The significance of honorary degrees from these leading German Universities is readily apparent.

In summarizing Dr. Levy's achievements as a scholar and a teacher, those who are personally familiar with his work are best qualified to speak. In 1948, P. W. Duff, Regius Professor of Civil Law at Cambridge University and an eminent British authority, wrote in the *Tulane Law Review*: "In America the greatest name in Roman Law studies is now that of Ernst Levy, Professor of Law, History and Political Science in the University of Washington, Seattle."² More recently, in connection with the publication of his most recent book on West Roman Vulgar Law, Professor Riesenfeld of the University of Minnesota Law School stated, "Any contribution to our knowledge from the pen of Professor Ernst Levy, long established as one of the most eminent students of this discipline, is bound to be significant, illuminating and provocative. . . . In the opinion of this reviewer Pro-

² 22 *TULANE LAW REVIEW* 4 (1947).

fessor Levy's contribution is one of the first order of magnitude. . . . It is hoped that the second part of the work dealing with contracts and torts will follow in short order."³ In May of 1952, an editorial written for *The Judgment* by one of Dr. Levy's students is significant. After commenting that as a teacher Dr. Levy was singularly effective, he continues: "He did not err in attempting to descend to the student's level, nor did he expect the student making his first acquaintance with a new subject to come up to his sophisticated level and to be, at first impression, fully conversant with refinements which he enjoyed as a scholar but was wise enough to leave outside the classroom; he recognized that the place for the scholar was in company with his books and that in the company of his students he should be a teacher. His patient insistence on clear thinking and proper preparation was governed by a rare insight and understanding of the raw young mind grasping for knowledge. As a result, students worked toward understanding without the handicaps of boredom on the one hand or the frustration of futility on the other."⁴

During his fifteen years at the University of Washington, Dr. Levy has made an unusual and valuable contribution to the Law School and he has earned the sincere affection and admiration of his colleagues and his students. We can only regret his retirement as a teacher at this time, but we are happy that he will remain in an advisory capacity while engaging in further research. We congratulate him upon his past achievements and wish him continued success in his future endeavors.

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³ 57 *AMERICAN HISTORICAL REVIEW* 659 (1952).

⁴ *THE JUDGMENT*, May, 1952, p. 2, col. 1.

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