AN HISTORICAL TREATISE ON THE FEUDAL LAW, AND THE CONSTITUTION AND LAWS OF ENGLAND

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HISTORICAL TREATISE

ONTHE

FEUDAL LAW,

AND THE

CONSTITUTION and LAWS

O F

ENGLAND;

With a Commentary on

MAGNACHARTA,

And necessary Illustrations of many of the

ENGLISH STATUTES.

In a Course of LECTURES read in the University of DUBLIN.

BY THE LATE

FRANCIS STOUGHTON SULLIVAN, L.L.D.

Royal Professor of the Common Law in that UNIVERSITY.

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HISTORY

O F

I R E L A N D

FROM THE

INVASION of HENRY the Second.

WITHA

PRELIMINARY DISCOURSE

ON THE

ANTIENT STATE of that KINGDOM.

By THOMAS LELAND, D.D.

Fellow of Trinity College, Dublin.

PREFACE.

HE study of the laws and customs of nations is a subject peculiarly interesting to mankind, considered either as philosophers, or members of particular societies. If it be a pleasure to us to trace the causes of those appearances which are continually soliciting our attention, and if it be the nature of man not to be satisfied with knowing merely that things are, without knowing also how they came to be what they are, it must give us great pleasure to have the origin and progress of the laws of our own country clearly unfolded to us; and persons of a speculative turn of mind, will have a peculiar relish for this kind of pleasure. Established customs are effects, in the contemplation of which we cannot help looking for a cause; and if a person of an inquisitive, and, I may say, of a proper turn of mind, cannot gaze at the rainbow with perfect fatisfaction, till he understands the manner in which it is formed, much less can he live contented without being able to account for what he sees every day, and what is more interesting to him, viz. the manners and customs of the people with whom he is most intimately connected, and to which he himself conforms.

The proper study of mankind is man, and we have no better access to the genuine principles of humane nature, than by means of the manners and customs which they have adopted, and the regulations to which they have chosen to submit their conduct. In them we see the objects of general desire, or general apprehension; and diversities in laws and customs are the best indices of diversities in the genius and disposition of nations; for they necessarily correspond to one another.

If simplicity in causes, and variety in effects, furnish a pleasing object of contemplation, the moral philosopher may expect the highest gratification from this theory, for here the surest and simplest principles will be found to have had the greatest and most extensive effects, and such as have continued (though changing with adequate circumstances) through a succession of many ages, to the present time. It is like tracing the course of a noble river, the waters of which, receiving continual recruits, and conducted in various beautiful windings, slow through and enrich a vast extent of country.

On this account the laws and customs of the European nations furnish an object of inquiry peculiarly pleasing. For in the manners of the old German nations, from which they are derived, we find the greatest simplicity imaginable; and, in a great variety of circumstances, they had their free, natural, and uncontrouled influence. Hence has arisen a most astonishing variety, though not without some general uniformity, in the manners and laws of many European nations, corresponding to the different situations into which they have been thrown; whereas, in other parts of the world, and especially in the East, we are presented with nothing but a disgusting uniformity; human nature, in those countries, having never been left to its natural luxuriancy, which can only arise from a state of independence, together with a variety in our circumstances and mutual relations; but every man, in that part of the world, has, from the earliest account of things, been either a tyrant or a slave.

For the same reason that the customs of the European nations, in general, associated a more pleasing object of speculation than those of other parts of the world, the laws and customs of England make an object more worthy of attention than those of other European states; because in this country the natural course of things has been less obstructed, or controuled by outward force. To resume our former allusion. In contemplating the laws of this country, in all their changes, from the earliest to the present times, we may consider ourselves.

ourselves as taking a view of a river, the course of which has been solely directed by the inequality of the surface over which it has slowed, and has not been conducted in channels made by art, and which it would not have chosen for itself. Here it is that we see how men have thought and acted for themselves, in which the influence of their natural disposition, and of their circumstances, has been uncontrouled; whereas, in the case of most other countries, we are only informed what regulations have been imposed by others. With respect to them the only subject of inquiry is the motive to which the imposition was owing; and this has seldom been any other than the lust of pleasure, or power, with little or no regard to any thing relating to the people who are chiefly interested in them.

Besides, England presents a scene in which great numbers were always free and independent, and in which the lowest orders of men have been gradually attaining more and more independence, till they are now as free as their masters themselves; and this is a spectacle that will ever be delightful to generous minds; whereas the history of France, and of most other European countries, in which we see nothing but one successful effort of tyranny after another, and in which human nature has been almost continually degraded and debased, cannot be read, except by those whose souls have been formed in that state of abject servitude, without indignation and disgust.

If we consider ourselves as uninterested in what is past, and concerned only in what is present, it still behaves us to form clear ideas of the relations we actually stand in to our fellow-creatures around us, and the rules by which our own conduct must be regulated. Every man must be concerned to know the demands which his neighbours and fellow-citizens have upon him, and the bounds of his own expectations from them. Every member of a state must feel himself interested to know the rank which he holds in the society.

fociety to which he belongs, and what higher and more conspicuous station it is in his power to attain, and also the degradations and sufferings to which he is exposed. Now this knowledge is acquired by nothing but the study of the constitution and laws of our own country.

Every thing that has been advanced in favour of the fubject of this treatife, the editor, who has given very particular attention to it, imagines to be in favour of the work itself: for in no other performance has he seen so just, so easy, and so comprehensive a view of the origin and progress of the English constitution and laws. At the same time that this work is sufficiently systematical, even for lawyers, the order of history, by which he has been principally guided, makes it peculiarly adapted to the use of gentlemen and scholars.

Though it will be seen that Dr. Sullivan had not compleated his whole scheme, yet he has brought the history of the English laws and constitution through all the changes that have any degree of disticulty attending them, and there are few topics of law, the present state of which he has not sufficiently explained. If the work had no other value, Dr. Sullivan's admirable vindication of the original freedom of our constitution, and his excellent commentary on Magna Charta, ought to render these lectures peculiarly dear to every Englishman.

No work executed on so general and liberal a plan as this ought to superfede more systematical treatises, with those who make the study of law a profession; but such a work will be greatly in aid of more systematical treatises, and make them much better understood. On this account those gentlemen who are possessed of Dr. Blackstone's Commentaries on the Laws of England will find their account in having Dr. Sullivan's also.

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