

**AN OUTLINE SKETCH OF
ENGLISH
CONSTITUTIONAL
HISTORY**

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An outline sketch of English constitutional history by George Burton Adams

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GEORGE BURTON ADAMS

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HISTORY**

R. L. Schuyler.

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AN OUTLINE SKETCH OF
ENGLISH CONSTITUTIONAL
HISTORY

GEORGE BURTON ADAMS, LITT. D.



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PREFACE

It is very likely that the task which I have undertaken in this little book is an impossible one. Even to sketch so long a history in so few words seems hopeless, and I am sure that I have left out many things which other students of the English constitution will think should be found here. I have tried to keep in mind in writing chiefly the desire to show how modern liberty came to be what it is and what foundations our institutions have in the past history of the race.

I am indebted to the Editors for permission to use portions of an article which appeared in the *American Historical Review* for July, 1915.

G. B. A.

New Haven,
January 22, 1918.

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*Where freedom slowly broadens down
From precedent to precedent.*

—Tennyson

INTRODUCTION

In the course of history there have been two peoples whose public law and institutions have formed the basis of many constitutions besides their own and who have exerted a wide influence upon government almost throughout the world. In ancient times the Romans built up by force a great empire which included the whole civilized world, as they knew it from actual contact, and large regions which they considered barbarian. Even before their empire was completed the Romans began to look upon it as divinely founded, preordained to be the one rule under which all mankind were to be permanently united. Later Christian teachers adopted the same philosophy of history, and the idea of the Roman Empire, eternal and holy, became for centuries a strong bond of union in Christendom at a time when most other tendencies were towards disruption. Partly from this influence and partly from their own intrinsic worth, Roman law and institutions came to prevail in almost all Christian nations and in extensive regions which were never Christian, and even today they influence more or less strongly the government and law of nearly half the human race.