CERTAINE CONSIDERATIONS UPON THE GOVERNMENT OF ENGLAND

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649415441

Certaine Considerations Upon the Government of England by Sir Roger Twysden & John Mitchell Kemble

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

www.triestepublishing.com

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UPON THE

GOVERNMENT OF ENGLAND.

BY

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EDITED

FROM THE UNPUBLISHED MANUSCRIPT

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ETC. ETC. ETC.

PRINTED FOR THE CAMDEN SOCIETY.

M.DCCC.XL.IX.

LONDON:
J. B. NICHOLS AND SON, PRINTERS,
PARLIAMENT STREET.

[NO. XLV.]

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INTRODUCTION.

THE valuable treatise which is now for the first time committed to the press is the work of one of the most laborious and judicious antiquaries that the seventeenth century produced. Many of our countrymen, of various ranks and in various branches of learning, were indeed distinguished at that period for a wide and sound erudition, and for a generous devotion to historical inquiry, which have never been surpassed by any generation of scholars. It was the age which comprehended the great names of Coke and Bacon, and Camden, Selden, Somner, Spelman, Evelyn, Digby, D'Ewes, Ashmole, Dugdale, Junius, Usher, Gill, Cotton, Savile, Whelock, and, though last not least, Twysden. Yet, amidst all this company of earnest, learned, and accomplished men, sir Roger Twysden occupies no secondary place. Like Selden and sir Symonds D'Ewes, he was engaged in the business of active political life, during the most exciting and troublous period of our history: he was a country gentleman, deeply mixed up with the affairs of his county; a careful landlord, responsible for the conduct of a large estate, and the welfare of a numerous tenantry; a justice of peace, and in the commission of oyer and terminer; a commissioner in the matter of ejected ministers; a deputy lieutenant at a time when lieutenancy was really a military function, and imposed other duties than wearing an uniform at a levee; last of all, he was a husband, and the father of

a numerous family; and it was then not easier than it now is to provide for daughters and younger sons a position consistent with the honour and dignity of the family from which they sprung. *Primogenitura facit appanagium:* but courtiers then swallowed up employments which have in later times been a happy resource for the scions of influential county families; and the squire of the seventeenth century had to provide means for cadets, which a more skilful age has sought in other modes of provision than a careful and frugal economy.

And yet, amidst all the distractions of political and public life, and the cares imposed upon him by his station and domestic circumstances, undeterred by difficulty, undismayed by persecution, we find him devoting the energies of a powerful mind to the investigation of our national antiquities, rendering some of our earlier authorities accessible for the first time to his fellow countrymen, and finally producing two of the most remarkable contributions we yet possess to our ecclesiastical and political history.

The student in an age like this, when the means of collecting knowledge are widely diffused, and the aids to its co-ordination and application sufficiently supplied, can form but a faint notion of the difficulties which, in the seventeenth century, still beset the path of the historical inquirer. Much that is now accessible through a never resting press was then still locked up in manuscripts, too often guarded with jealous care from the eye of a stranger. No British Museum opened its hospitable doors to every respectable applicant; and even though Cotton and D'Ewes, and other equally noble men, gave great facilities to all who had any claims upon their notice, in many cases long negotiations and no little diplomacy were necessary in order to obtain sight of a rare book or valuable manuscript.

Continental works of the greatest note were not then easily obtained, and even when picked up by the travelling Englishman were only to be purchased at a high rate, and at imminent risk of miscarriage in the transport to this country. Above all, historical studies were but in their infancy: nor had the zeal and labour of successive generations of scholars yet established that critical apparatus, without which so many problems in chronology and philology would still remain unsolved.

And yet it is impossible to deny that no age has produced a more vigorous race of thinkers, or one to which we owe more gratitude for their labours.

It does not, however, seem difficult to account for this. It was an age of restless mental activity, in which every energy of mind was braced and trained by the daily exigences of public life: when great principles were still to be brought into light, great ends still to be struggled for, and when strong minds eagerly took part in the struggle, to which circumstances irresistibly hurried them on. The storm of the Reformation had not so long passed away, but what the whole frame of society still rocked and swayed with the convulsion. Men were yet living who had seen the fires of Smithfield, or trembled at the savage insolence of Bonner: more had shouted when the Jesuits were turned off at Tyburn, or had appeared in the array at Tilbury, or had joined in the rejoicing over the ruin of the Armada, and the salvation of the Protestant interest in Europe. The sudden awakening of the human intellect from its sleep of ages had been followed by a prodigious activity, and that had necessarily been directed upon the questions which were now of vital and incomparable interest. The upholders of the papacy had learnt that acts of parliament and royal proclamations were not sufficient to repress the