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WILLIAM ALFRED MORRIS

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THE
FRANKPLEDGE SYSTEM

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TO THE MEMORY OF
PROFESSOR CHARLES GROSS
IS DEDICATED THIS WORK
UNDERTAKEN THROUGH HIS INSPIRATION
AND COMPLETED UNDER HIS GUIDANCE

• PREFACE

No writer has hitherto made a study of frankpledge except in a very few of its aspects. From 1832, the date of Palgrave's *Rise and Progress of the English Commonwealth*, down to the publication of Maitland's *Select Pleas in Manorial and other Seignorial Courts* in 1889, interest was almost exclusively centred in questions relating to the time and place of the origin of the system and to its supposed importance in the communal organization of Saxon England. Maitland's investigation as to its place in the tourn and leet system, published in the above-named volume, opened up a new field by emphasizing the real constitutional significance of the institution; and in the last twenty years there has been published and made easily accessible much material illustrating the procedure of the various medieval English courts that had to do with frankpledge, and thus affording a view of the system in operation. Only one person, however, has attempted to make such a study of the workings of the system as its importance demands, and even his investigation is limited in range to a local field, the city of Norwich; but the excellence and interest of this work (Hudson's *Leet Jurisdiction in Norwich*, published some seventeen years ago) encourage the undertaking of a similar study of the institution wherever found in England. One might well wish that Liebermann, the latest and most accurate scholar to write upon frankpledge, had been able to turn his great learning in