

With his greater singleness of purpose, Coke was enabled to accomplish, though in a very different way, a task that Bacon was compelled to forego. Though not the author of the English system of reporting, he brought the art to a degree of perfection never before attained, and rarely reached in latter times; he gave to the office of reporter a new dignity and importance; while in his commentaries upon Littleton he covered the whole field of English law as it then existed. His reverence for antiquity prevented him from discriminating between things in full force and things obsolescent and things obsolete; and hence he devoutly preserved every technicality that was anywhere imbedded in the law; thus hampering legal development along the lines of natural justice and equity, and raising up that large and influential body of lawyers, who, adhering always to the strictest letter of the law, made a fetish of every conceivable technicality; lawyers who rendered perpetual homage to the deified Quibble; who shuddered at the thought of an erasure in a deed; who were ready to go into convulsions at a suggestion to amend a pleading; and who seemed really to believe that the universe would some day be derailed and destroyed by a misplaced comma.

There is no doubt but that Coke's work was and remains a colossal monument of labor and industry. He was the Moses that led the profession out of the wilderness of the year-books, the abridgments, the unwritten, the confused and undefined customs. Before this, the law was but poorly understood, or was not understood at all; but Coke flattered himself that, with his commentaries, which offered a short road to knowledge, a man might hope to attain to some acquaintance with the common law after the lucubrations of twenty years; a saying that must have filled the hearts of the students of the Inner Temple with exceeding joy.

When the crowning edifice of the common law was thus made complete, Bacon had already set at work the forces that were to effect its demolition. The common law established a lay and ecclesiastical hierarchy reaching from the serf to the throne. The political fabric was mortised and riveted together in every possible way. The penal laws were hardly less bloody than those of Draco. The feudal system of land laws, with its fantastic complications, its oppressive exactions, afforded a striking