

beautiful simplicity, in the infancy and rising strength of government, in history, in poetry, and in arts.

On a foundation thus simple has been reared the great system of universal jurisprudence, collecting in its slow progression the wisdom of ages;—a system so intimately connected with history, as to make it impossible for you, or any one, to understand its principles, without recurring to that stage of society when the mind was only qualified for sowing the seeds of liberty. We have reason to thank Heaven, and to bless a soil that may justly be compared to the river Nile, in spreading a fertility every where around its noble source. Perhaps, too, there cannot be a better criterion for coming at the true history of a people, than by attending to their laws and customs through the channel of history. And can the mind receive a nobler or more elevated gratification than it receives in attending to historical deductions of law, to the final establishment of an enlightened polity, to the completion of those principles of liberty which exalt the human character, and which have made us in particular a nation of freemen! The reason is exercised in discovering latent causes; and tracing effects through a long and numerous train of nice, yet beautiful dependencies. The English law cannot be acquired in a liberal and polite manner, neither can its admirable constitution be understood without an attention to the history and principles of the ages which gave life and vigour to both.

Lord Kames, speaking of the historical principles of law, has the following beautiful and apposite resemblance of it to the river Nile: "When we enter upon the municipal law of any country in its present state, we resemble a traveller who, crossing the Delta, loses his way amongst the numberless branches of the Egyptian river; but when we begin at the source, and follow the current of law, it is in that course no less easy than agreeable, and all its relations, and dependencies are traced with no greater difficulty, than are the many streams into which that magnificent river is divided, before it is lost in the sea." In a situation thus bewildered you will find yourself, unless you begin with the history and original sources of English law. You must trace the feudal system,—attend its spirit, genius, and consequences, to the ages that witnessed its meridian sway,—carefully peruse the history of this strange policy from the Conquest of the latter end of the reign of Charles II., when a statute was made for the abolition of military tenures, the great pillar of the feudal system. This statute gave it a mortal blow; it fell we hope to rise no more. In your legal progress you will observe many of its vestiges in our present juridical code.—Much of our common law is deducible from this source, particularly the laws of descent, and therefore cannot be explained, in a scholar-like and rational way, without a strict acquaintance with the laws introduced by the Conqueror. We depreciate the government of William on account of its despotic consequences, yet we enjoy at this hour lasting advantages from it. The English constitution rises before, the eye in solemn grandeur and majesty, but it is, nevertheless, founded on a basis made of various materials. Much was added to the magnificence of its superstructure during the feudal ages. The foundation stone was only laid by the hand of the immortal Alfred;