

ROMAN LAW.

Introductory Lecture on the Roman Law, delivered by Frederick W. Torrance, Esquire, in connection with the Law Faculty of McGill College, Montreal, in the Hall of the Court of Appeals, Montreal, on the 13th January, 1854.

“Comme si les grandes destinées de Rome n'étaient pas encore accomplies ; elle regne dans toute la terre par sa raison, après avoir cessé d'y regner par son autorité.”—D'Aguesseau, Œuvres, 1, 157.

It having been committed to my charge to deliver a course of Lectures on the Roman Law, it is fitting that I should introduce the subject with such observations as shall tend to bring it home to our understandings. By this means, the attention of the hearer will be awakened, and he will enter upon the course with his feelings interested and his mind engaged. In pursuance of this plan the topics which naturally present themselves for our consideration in an introductory Lecture, are the national characteristics of the Ancient Romans—their national policy—the characteristics of their famous Jurisprudence—and the advantages to be derived from its study, by the man of education and the Lawyer.

The laws of a nation form the most instructive part of its history. If a man would learn much of the genius and habits of a people, and be instructed by the events of its history, he should study its laws.

There is not in the history of the world to be found a subject of more interesting and profitable contemplation than is presented by the rise, progress and downfall of the Ancient Roman Empire,—whether we consider the space it has occupied in the civilization of our earth, during the time of its existence, or the influence it has since exercised on the growth of modern civilization.

The extent and grandeur of the Roman Empire far exceeded that of any other people of antiquity. It comprehended the fairest parts of the then known earth ; and so majestic were its proportions, that its greatest historian ends his memorable history with the observation, that its decline and fall presents the greatest, perhaps, and the most awful scene in the history of mankind.*

It measured in breadth about 2000 miles from the wall of Antoninus and the northern limits of Dacia, to mount Atlas and the tropic of Cancer,—in length about 3000 miles from the Western Ocean to the Euphrates ;—embracing the fairest portion of the temperate zone ; it was supposed to contain 1,600,000 square miles, for the most part of

* Gibbon's Decline, v. 6, p. 541, cap. LXXI.