

who, if I am not mistaken, know the history of their country better than the English know that of England, will not suppose that I have ignored this instruction, but will allow for the omissions forced on me by the magnitude of the subject which I am trying to compress into two volumes. Similar reasons have compelled me to deal briefly with the legal aspects of the Constitution; but this is a defect which the lay reader will probably deem a merit.

Even when limited by the exclusion of history and law, the subject remains so vast and complex as to make necessary an explanation of the conception I have formed of it, and of the plan upon which the book has been constructed.

There are three main things that one wishes to know about a national commonwealth, viz. its framework and constitutional machinery, the methods by which it is worked, the forces which move it and direct its course. It is natural to begin with the first of these. Accordingly, I begin with the government; and as the powers of government are two-fold, being vested partly in the National or Federal authorities and partly in the States, I begin with the National government, whose structure presents less difficulty to European minds, because it resembles the national government in each of their own countries. Part I. therefore contains an account of the several Federal authorities, the President, Congress, the Courts of Law. It describes the relations of the National or central power to the several States. It discusses the nature of the Constitution as a fundamental supreme law, and shows how this stable and rigid instrument has been in a few points expressly, in many others tacitly and half-unconsciously modified.

Part II. deals similarly with the State Governments, examining the constitutions that have established them, the authorities which administer them, the practical working of their legislative bodies. And as local government is a matter of State regulation, there is also given some account of the systems of rural and city government which have been created in the various States, and which have, rural government for its merits and city government for its faults, become the theme of copious discussion among foreign students of American institutions.

(Part III.) The whole machinery, both of national and of State governments, is worked by the political parties. Parties have been organized far more elaborately in the United States