

THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT IN ENGLAND.

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GOVERNMENTS are of two kinds—domestic and political. Political governments may be roughly divided into three classes—monarchies, mixed governments, and democracies.

Though it is equally far from my province and intention to deliver a political party lecture. I shall endeavour to establish three propositions, viz.:—I. That some form of government between Monarchy on the one hand, and Democracy on the other, is, when possible, better than either. II. That our own form of government is second to none. III. That by our present Constitution the Crown, the Lords and the Commons are the three trustees of the national interests, each and all being as such bound, when they cannot conscientiously agree, to act independently the one of the other, and to trust to the nation for its support when so doing.

For this purpose I propose to offer for your consideration a few observations on some of the fundamental principles of government, upon some of the leading features of our own system, and to conclude my paper by indicating what appears to me to be the chief landmarks in the history of the growth of constitutional government in England.

When in 1783 our fellow-countrymen in America—irritated, and not unnaturally, at the treatment received by them at the hands of the ill-advised ministers of George III.—declared their independence, for which they had fought as few but Britons could fight, they adopted the public and the private law of England, and so far as possible the principles of our constitution. In its integrity they

could neither adopt nor imitate the Constitutional Government of England, for they lacked two of its essential elements—royalty and a nobility.

That no human institution is or can be perfect is a proposition not likely to be questioned. The closer, however, that we keep to nature, the nearer we shall get to perfection. The family is a natural institution. The parents and their children constitute the first social community of which man has any knowledge. Nature in the family circle gives us the first notion of superior and inferior, of government and of its necessary modifications. When we were young our parents, guardians and schoolmasters did their best to instil into our juvenile minds their notions as to the difference between the elder and the younger, the superior and the inferior, and the duty of the inferior to obey; now that we have grown older and tried our hands at government, we see the matter from a different point of view. We used to think that the governor had the best of it. We are not quite so sure of that now. There is one thing about which we have never doubted—that is, when governor and governed are agreed, each conscientiously doing his part, there are happy times. There is one thing about which we doubted much and still doubt—that is, where to draw the line between the respective duties of the governor and the governed, whose relative position is ever changing. It is not every one who can keep the eye so steadily and the hand so gently yet so firmly on the break as to pull up at the right moment without a jar. There is the age of blind obedience, when the parent knows, but the child