

I AM aware that the scrupulous dignity of the law of England has not been accustomed to receive, as authorities, any thing less than the opinions delivered by judges upon the bench; the arguments of counsel in court, and their opinions at chambers, are placed among those extrajudicial and private matters that are wanting in the essential quality which should constitute a juridical authority. But it may be said, with due deference to the oracles which speak in our courts, that the opinions of lawyers have an advantage which *those* have not: they come down to us in the writing of the author—his own meaning conveyed in his own words; the opinions of courts, on the other hand, are usually conveyed by some auditor; and the clearest judgment may, in after-time, be brought in question from the inaccuracy of contradictory reports. Indeed I can entertain no doubt but an opinion ascertained to be really given by a person filling the office of king's attorney or solicitor, upon points of revenue and rights of the crown, will be received by lawyers as a very high authority; and I shall think myself very fortunate in having had an opportunity to bring together a considerable degree of information from materials of that sort.

WITH these helps from the decisions of courts, and the opinions of law-officers of the crown, it is hoped some light may be thrown on the acts of parliament, which are the subject of this History.

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