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CERTAIN CONSIDERATIONS

UPON THE

GOVERNMENT OF ENGLAND.

BY

SIR ROGER TWYSDEN, KT. AND BART.

EDITED

FROM THE UNPUBLISHED MANUSCRIPT

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INTRODUCTION.

THE valuable treatise which is now for the first time committed to the press is the work of one of the most laborious and judicious antiquaries that the seventeenth century produced. Many of our countrymen, of various ranks and in various branches of learning, were indeed distinguished at that period for a wide and sound erudition, and for a generous devotion to historical inquiry, which have never been surpassed by any generation of scholars. It was the age which comprehended the great names of Coke and Bacon, and Camden, Selden, Somner, Spelman, Evelyn, Digby, D'Ewes, Ashmole, Dugdale, Junius, Usher, Gill, Cotton, Savile, Whelock, and, though last not least, Twysden. Yet, amidst all this company of earnest, learned, and accomplished men, sir Roger Twysden occupies no secondary place. Like Selden and sir Symonds D'Ewes, he was engaged in the business of active political life, during the most exciting and troublous period of our history: he was a country gentleman, deeply mixed up with the affairs of his county; a careful landlord, responsible for the conduct of a large estate, and the welfare of a numerous tenantry; a justice of peace, and in the commission of oyer and terminer; a commissioner in the matter of ejected ministers; a deputy lieutenant at a time when lieutenantcy was really a military function, and imposed other duties than wearing an uniform at a levee; last of all, he was a husband, and the father of

a numerous family; and it was then not easier than it now is to provide for daughters and younger sons a position consistent with the honour and dignity of the family from which they sprung. *Primo-genitura facit appanagium*: but courtiers then swallowed up employments which have in later times been a happy resource for the scions of influential county families; and the squire of the seventeenth century had to provide means for cadets, which a more skilful age has sought in other modes of provision than a careful and frugal economy.

And yet, amidst all the distractions of political and public life, and the cares imposed upon him by his station and domestic circumstances, undeterred by difficulty, undismayed by persecution, we find him devoting the energies of a powerful mind to the investigation of our national antiquities, rendering some of our earlier authorities accessible for the first time to his fellow countrymen, and finally producing two of the most remarkable contributions we yet possess to our ecclesiastical and political history.

The student in an age like this, when the means of collecting knowledge are widely diffused, and the aids to its co-ordination and application sufficiently supplied, can form but a faint notion of the difficulties which, in the seventeenth century, still beset the path of the historical inquirer. Much that is now accessible through a never resting press was then still locked up in manuscripts, too often guarded with jealous care from the eye of a stranger. No British Museum opened its hospitable doors to every respectable applicant; and even though Cotton and D'Ewes, and other equally noble men, gave great facilities to all who had any claims upon their notice, in many cases long negotiations and no little diplomacy were necessary in order to obtain sight of a rare book or valuable manuscript.

Continental works of the greatest note were not then easily obtained, and even when picked up by the travelling Englishman were only to be purchased at a high rate, and at imminent risk of miscarriage in the transport to this country. Above all, historical studies were but in their infancy: nor had the zeal and labour of successive generations of scholars yet established that critical apparatus, without which so many problems in chronology and philology would still remain unsolved.

And yet it is impossible to deny that no age has produced a more vigorous race of thinkers, or one to which we owe more gratitude for their labours.

It does not, however, seem difficult to account for this. It was an age of restless mental activity, in which every energy of mind was braced and trained by the daily exigences of public life: when great principles were still to be brought into light, great ends still to be struggled for, and when strong minds eagerly took part in the struggle, to which circumstances irresistibly hurried them on. The storm of the Reformation had not so long passed away, but what the whole frame of society still rocked and swayed with the convulsion. Men were yet living who had seen the fires of Smithfield, or trembled at the savage insolence of Bonner: more had shouted when the Jesuits were turned off at Tyburn, or had appeared in the array at Tilbury, or had joined in the rejoicing over the ruin of the Armada, and the salvation of the Protestant interest in Europe. The sudden awakening of the human intellect from its sleep of ages had been followed by a prodigious activity, and that had necessarily been directed upon the questions which were now of vital and incomparable interest. The upholders of the papacy had learnt that acts of parliament and royal proclamations were not sufficient to repress the

dangerous opinions of innovators who appealed to the word of God and the traditions of history. The fagot and the scaffold are poor arguments, that may silence, but cannot convince: and, like the dragon's teeth of old, each martyr's blood gave birth to a new army. In their despair the papists appealed also to the past, and the battle was soon shifted to the field of philology and history. From that moment the result was inevitable. Then all at once every earnest and thinking man found that the weapons with which he was to combat must be drawn from a new armoury. The innovators appealed to the bible, the works of the fathers, the ecclesiastical historians: their adversaries were compelled to deny the accuracy of the translations, the correctness of the deductions. Philology and logic, the two stern muses, were at once made the arbiters of the contest. Men of all classes, whose eternal salvation depended upon their really ascertaining the truth, laboured over Hebrew rolls and toiled through Greek manuscripts: tradesmen and shop-keepers, soldiers, country-gentlemen, peers, and privy-councillors adopted the studies which had been neglected by bishops and cardinals: one by one every gross error was purged away, and the full triumph of the Reformation secured. Neither the passions of Henry the Eighth, nor the profligate infidelity of Leo, nor the rude violence of Luther, did it, though all aided it: in truth, the time was come when the great intellectual birth of the age was become too big for swaddling clothes.

But even therefore the power thus raised was not to subside when the circumstances that had evoked it passed away. The commencement of the seventeenth century saw parties very differently situated from those of the sixteenth. The fury of vulgar persecution had indeed been allayed, and neither the pile nor the scaffold

were now the daily resources of exasperated polemics; but controversy had not been silenced abroad, even if it were compelled to mutter in secret here: and good service was yet to be done in refuting Spanish and French and Italian champions, who, comprehending at last the new nature of the contest, brought to it logical and philological weapons, scarcely less keen and polished than those of their opponents.

Moreover, although the cause of the Reformation had triumphed, the reformers themselves were very far from agreed as to the system which was to be set up in place of that which had been overthrown. The articles of the Church, after much botching and patching, had been left in a condition little consistent with the general tendency of the Liturgy. The germs of the Low and High Church parties, big with future convulsions, had already shown themselves. The successors of Cranmer and the predecessors of Laud were already measuring one another's powers for a deadly struggle; and puritanism, bred in the midst of civil discord, growled and scowled in the distance. That unanimity which had never been attained under the leaden despotism of a Church which strained every nerve to assure it, was little likely to result from the studies of a thousand men, of all varying powers,—the sternly logical, the imaginative, the enthusiastic, the savage and persecuted, the refined and instructed. The bible had indeed been proclaimed the sole rule of faith, but then there were differences of translation as to various passages, differences of opinion as to its doctrines, and nearly as many controversies as readers. For the great misfortune of mankind its chapters had been divided into verses, which might be quoted for any purpose, good or bad, without reference to the context. Many still hankered after what their adversaries called the