



The History of Normandy and of England Volume 1

Francis Palgrave

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This is Volume 1 of a comprehensive history of the Normans and Anglo-Saxons in France and England respectively, culminating with the Norman Conquest by William the Conqueror in the 11th century. That event, one of the most influential of the millennium, charted a new course for the history of England.

From the preface:

“The richness of our Anglo-Norman history is so exuberant that I could not bring myself to compress the vintage into a juiceless residuum. Therefore, renouncing the hope of prosecuting the work to the Tudor era, I finally determined to restrict myself to such a portion or portions as my times would allow:—not stintedly, but upon a scale commensurate with their value;—hence the bulk which the work has acquired.

Arnold was blamed for the length of his volumes. I would reply to the like objection, should it be raised, in Arnold's words: “I am convinced by a tolerably large experience, that most readers find it almost impossible to impress on their memories a mere abridgment of history the number of names and events crowded into a small space is overwhelming to them, and the absence of details in the narrative makes it impossible to communicate to it much of interest. Neither characters nor events can be developed with that particularity which is the best help to the memory, because it attracts and engages us, and impresses images on the mind as well as facts.”

Not merely are meagre abridgments devoid of interest, but, under the existing circumstances of society, they become snares for the conscience, seducing men to content themselves with a perfunctory notion of history, and, when occasion calls, to act upon imperfect knowledge.

Historical truth never can be elicited save by comparison. Particularly is this labour of comparison incumbent upon every one who, in his sphere, may be called upon to legislate or influence the duty of legislation, a duty perhaps involving the most fearful responsibility which can devolve upon any human being; for the function of the Lawgiver is the highest exercised by man. Human institutions are rarely, perhaps never, beneficial or mischievous, simply in themselves; they become beneficial or mischievous by their relation to other institutions; and therefore when presented to ratiocination without these concurrent circumstances, they only mislead the judgment, substituting words and phrases for real knowledge. No one book, however excellent, can teach you singly and alone. History requires no less study than Law. We cannot dabble in its practical application. Would you take upon yourself to pay down your purchase-money for an acre of land, upon your knowledge of conveyancing derived from Blackstone's Commentaries

The publication of a work which has occupied the best part of my life is not unattended by considerable anxiety. In every stage it has been spoken that is to say, written down by dictation, and transcribed from dictation. Advantages and disadvantages, counterbalancing each other, attend this mode of composition. The sound of his own voice encourages the speaker to express his mind more fully than when he is sitting before his desk.—The single amanuensis represents a whole audience. But a speaker may also be seduced into many liberties of speech, and tempted to indulge in digressions and fancies which would not have occurred to him if penning his silent thoughts in solitude.”

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