

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

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Local Government by M. D. Chalmers

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M. D. CHALMERS

**LOCAL
GOVERNMENT**

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BY

M. D. CHALMERS, M.A.

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London

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1883

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PREFACE.

OUR political constitution rests for the most part on the unwritten customs of England, but our system of Local Government is almost entirely regulated by statute law, even to its minutest details. There are about 650 Acts, or fragments of Acts, of general application relating to local affairs. These public Acts are supplemented by some thousands of local and special Acts, which apply to particular towns or districts, and accumulate at the rate of about sixty a year. Our local legislation begins with the statute *De Officio Coronatoris*, passed in 1275, and ends for the present with the Divided Parishes Act of 1882. Between these terminal marks the various Acts are scattered up and down in wild confusion. The reader's journey through this dark valley of statutory dry bones must needs be a dull one. Writing law books is not a good literary training, and I have no power of enlivening the pilgrimage, or making the way seem picturesque. I have tried, however, to make the book as intelligible and accurate as the nature of the subject admits of. My difficulty is this:—Every principle that can be stated is liable to be obscured by a dense overgrowth of local exceptions. To attempt to go into local

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PREFACE.

details and anomalies would only confuse the reader and render my task endless. I have therefore kept to propositions of general application. For instance, in describing the constitution of Municipal Boroughs I have not adverted to the special savings for Cambridge and the Cinque Ports or the long array of special Acts relating to Liverpool and Manchester. Once for all, then, whenever I state a proposition, I must ask the reader kindly to repeat before it the formula, "Except as otherwise provided by any local or special Act, and subject to any exceptions or savings in the general Acts."

I have to tender my best thanks to Mr. R. S. Wright, who most kindly gave me copies of the Memoranda he prepared in 1877 for Mr. Whitbread and Mr. Rathbone. I have found them invaluable. For the early history of our local institutions I have mainly used Professor Stubbs's *Constitutional History*.

M. D. C.

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LOCAL GOVERNMENT.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

Sphere of Local Government—Constitutional Importance—Local Government in India—The Village Community—Comparison of Local and Central Government in England—Rates and Taxation—Position of Women—The Governing Classes—Local Government in France.

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THE object of the present volume is to describe the existing machinery of Local Government in England, and to give a short account of those matters locally administered which do not form the subject of separate volumes of the English Citizen Series. No English institution is intelligible apart from its history. All our local organisations have grown up spontaneously and irregularly. A brief historical sketch is therefore included in the description of the various local institutions which in the aggregate constitute our system of local government.

By local government, as opposed to central government, is meant the administration of those matters which concern only the inhabitants of a particular district or