

to have incorporated the commissioner's rules into the volume under review.<sup>10</sup>

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BLACKSTONE'S COMMENTARIES ON THE LAW. *Edited by Dean Bernard C. Gavit. Washington Law Book Co., Washington, D. C. 1941.*

In the early part of the eighteenth century, Mary Bigg, the daughter of Lovelace Bigg, a member of the landed aristocracy, married a common tradesman. Her husband, Charles Blackstone, was but a silk merchant living in Cheapside. From this union was born a child, William Blackstone, who rose from his poor surroundings to become a professor in one of England's largest universities, a Knight of the realm, and a justice of the King's courts of that country.

It was during Sir William's years as a professor of law at Oxford University that the groundwork for his *Commentaries on The Law* was formulated. They originated in the course of lectures repeated every year for fifteen years, and at the end of that time were published with such success that Blackstone realized over eighty thousand dollars from the publication—and this a book of law. Blackstone was the first to give the law the air of science. "He found it a skeleton and clothed it with life, color and complexion. He embraced the cold statue and by his touch it grew into youth, health and beauty."

Influence of the *Commentaries* in training and inspiring American statesmen can not be accurately measured. For over 150 years it was a "first" book for lawyers, students, scholars and the cultured public. This book was the turning point in the lives of John Marshall, Daniel Webster and many others. Sixteen signers of the Declaration of Independence knew it from cover to cover. Abraham Lincoln found a copy in a barrel—and it changed his life, and the life of our nation. 73 editions in English, 56 in French, 11 in German, 9 in Italian; editions in most every language including the

<sup>10</sup> The added cost involved in including the rules and their rather tentative character have been assigned by the commissioner as reasons for failing to add them as above suggested.

Chinese attest to the fact that Blackstone is a landmark in literature as well as the law.

Numerous editions of the work have appeared, more or less abridged, and usually copiously annotated. The result has been to confuse the reader and divert from the original text. Dr. Samuel Johnson once said that "the general effect of any work is weakened by notes of commentators; the mind is chilled by such interruption, and the thoughts diverted from the original subject; until the reader, wearied by perusal of the notes and comments, at last discards the book itself, for its beauty is no longer discernible." It is gratifying to discover that the Gavit edition includes none of the authorities which Blackstone cited in the original text, and has reduced the text itself to almost half its original size. Since this volume was intended for the layman, as well as students and lawyers, no effort was made to elaborate in detail upon the various matters discussed. At the end of each chapter there is a brief commentary by the editor of this edition, Dean Gavit, for the purpose of explaining some of the more technical portions of the law as described by Blackstone, and indicating the development of this law in the United States since Blackstone's time.

Dean Bernard C. Gavit is a member of Phi Delta Phi, Phi Delta Theta, Order of Coif and Phi Beta Kappa. He is the author of numerous books and a contributor of articles to legal publications. Dean of the Law School at the University of Indiana since 1929, he is listed in *Who's Who in America*. His present edition of Blackstone's *Commentaries on The Law* is recommended reading for all.

ROBERT W. COOK,  
*Book Review Editor.*

“Begin with Blackstone’s Commentaries.” So replied Abraham Lincoln to J. M. Brockman, who, in 1860, asked the future president about “the best mode of obtaining a thorough knowledge of the law.” Lincoln was referring to William Blackstone’s multivolume Commentaries on the Laws of England. Blackstone (1723–1780) composed the work from his Oxford lectures on English law – the first of the sort ever given at an English university. When Mike Dukakis was asked by CNN’s blunt Bernard Shaw during the 1988 presidential debates whether he would support the death penalty if his wife, Kitty, had been raped and murdered, the Massachusetts governor famously responded, “No, I don’t, Bernard, and I think you know that I’ve opposed the death Sir William Blackstone’s Commentaries on the Laws of England is the great text of the common law. First published in four volumes between 1765 and 1767, it was the legal publishing sensation of the 18th century, quickly going through eight editions in Blackstone’s lifetime and numerous others well into the 19th century. The Cavendish Edition is not a facsimile but a complete. Sir William Blackstone’s Commentaries on the Laws of England is the great text of the common law. First published in four volumes between 1765 and 1767, it was the legal publishing sensation of the 18th century, quickly goin BLACKSTONE’S Commentaries on the Laws of England was on its appearance received with unbounded admiration. It was felt to be a work of untold originality. The author became at once the Great Commentator. In the eyes of his earliest readers he was not only an erudite lawyer and a charming writer, but also a profound jurist. The effect and the solidity of this education in law and politics has been underrated in Europe. 4 The Teaching of English Law at Universities, by James Bradley Thayer LL. D., Weld Professor of Law at Harvard (1895), pp. 4, 5. From this pamphlet, which ought to be far better known in England than it is, my statements as to the influence of Blackstone in America are mainly taken; it is, however, past a doubt. 5 Written in 1909.