Commentaries on the law of municipal corporations

Dillon John Forrest
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Author: Dillon John Forrest

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COMMENTARIES
ON THE LAW OF
MUNICIPAL CORPORATIONS.

BY
JOHN F. DILLON, LL.D.,
MEMBER L'INSTITUT DE DROIT INTERNATIONAL; LATE PROFESSOR OF REAL ESTATE
AND EQUITY JURISPRUDENCE IN COLUMBIA COLLEGE LAW SCHOOL;
FORMERLY CIRCUIT JUDGE OF THE UNITED STATES
FOR THE EIGHTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT, AND
CHIEF JUSTICE OF THE SUPREME
COURT OF IOWA.

FOURTH EDITION,
THOROUGHLY REVISED AND ENLARGED.

Vol. I.

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TO THE

HONORABLE SAMUEL F. MILLER, LL.D.,

ASSOCIATE JUSTICE OF THE SUPREME COURT
OF THE UNITED STATES.

YOUR ACKNOWLEDGED MASTERY OF THE SUBJECT TO WHICH
THIS WORK RELATES MAKES IT FITTING,
YOUR ESTABLISHED AND PERMANENT RANK IN OUR JURIDICAL AND
CONSTITUTIONAL HISTORY AS A GREAT AND ILLUS-
TRIOUS JUDGE MAKES IT AN HONOR,
AND OUR LONG AND UNBROKEN FRIENDSHIP MAKES IT A
RENEWED PERSONAL PLEASURE,
ALBEIT THE EVENING SHADOWS OF OUR LIVES FALL
UPON THE PAGE,
TO REINSCRIBE TO YOU WITH UNALTERED REGARD AND VENERATION
THIS REVISED EDITION OF A WORK WHICH, MORE THAN
EIGHTEEN YEARS AGO, WAS ORIGINALLY
DEDICATED TO YOU.
PREFACE TO THE FOURTH EDITION.

In the nine years that have passed since the last edition of these Commentaries appeared, constitutional provisions have been adopted, legislative enactments passed, and numerous State and Federal decisions made on the important subjects which are embraced in its plan. And thus the law has not only been still further extended on previous lines, but it has in material respects been modified, altered, and enlarged. This is well known to those who have kept currently informed of the general progress of our jurisprudence; it will be apparent to all who shall compare the chapters of the present edition with the corresponding chapters of the previous edition upon Constitutional Limitations, Contracts, Streets, Eminent Domain, Taxation, Actions and Liabilities.

That the work shall adequately present the law relating to our Municipalities as it exists to-day, the author has spared no reasonable labor. The adjudged cases to date have been examined one by one, and the results thereof are embodied in this edition.

Grateful to the Courts and to the Profession for the favor with which from the first they have regarded the work, and with, as the author trusts, a pardonable ambition on his part to improve it, he deems it to be due to them, as well as to himself, to state that he has sought with diligent and loving care to make the revision thor-
ough, and that to this end he has personally gone over not only every section but every sentence, and has made such changes as the expansion of the law required and his own maturer judgment approved. Scarcely a single section is without alterations or additions.

A few further observations may be permitted, if, indeed, they are not required. In this day of the unprecedented multiplication of law books, there are two questions which the profession may as of right put to an author. The first is, Can your work justify its existence? The justification of the present Treatise is placed on the grounds quite fully stated in the preface to the first edition, which in substance are, that the subject is of acknowledged importance in all the States and Territories of the Union; that no English work is applicable or adequate; and that no other American work thereon existed or exists.

The other question is, Can it justify its size? An elementary treatise may be wrought out upon one of two different plans. The one is to state as clearly as may be ultimate legal principles without any or much elaboration of their grounds and reasons. It requires the mind of a master to frame propositions which shall be at once comprehensive and exact. Instinctively the profession in both countries has immemorially shared in Lord Eldon's fear of the dangers that lurk in abstract and general propositions. The other is to state such propositions and principles, but to state them in connection with the reasons and grounds on which they rest, which are chiefly to be found in the adjudged cases. The latter course has been here pursued, for reasons which are peculiarly forcible in a treatise on this subject and in this country. Our Municipalities are inseparably connected with the organic framework and with the daily action of our political institutions. The law relating to them is developed day by day in the actual workings of those institutions in every
section of the country, and this development registers itself in constitutional provisions, in statutory enactments, and in judicial judgments. In this work the people, the legislatures, and the Courts, State and National, all take their respective parts, of which perhaps the most important, certainly the most varied and constant, is the part taken by the judicial tribunals. It is the high and delicate office of the judiciary department to elaborate the rough materials of our daily experience and litigation into the enduring products of law and justice, and to place on record for our instruction and guidance the reasons of the Judges for every step in this wondrous, this ceaseless, this beneficent process.

No writer on our jurisprudence is authorized to speak oracularly, to excogitate a system, or to give to his views any authoritative sanction. To this rule the most eminent are no exception, since every work upon our law is necessarily unauthoritative. No author can alter this inexorable condition; and any author ought to be content, and certainly will be fortunate, if he can leave on the imperishable structure of our jurisprudence some visible imprint, some lasting touch, some embodied memorial, however slight, of his labors. Even judicial judgments, if unaccompanied by the reasons on which they rest and which give to them their real worth, would have no recognized standing — and ought to have none — in the professional estimation and regard.

It is the humble function — but, at the same time, the priceless privilege — of an author to traverse the wide, rich, and varied fields which the legislative records and the judicial reports of all the peoples in both hemispheres who have adopted the institutions and who use the tongue of England thus open to him; to gather, analyze, and compare, and then to state the results of his labors and his studies, accompanied with his own reflections, criticisms,
and conclusions, which, however, have the value, and only the value, that their reason, soundness, and justice give to them.

The ancient mere-stones of the law must not be removed, but reverently preserved and regarded. It is, however, a mistake and a delusion to suppose that they either do or can permanently mark the actual or necessary boundaries of our jurisprudence. "In all forms of government," said Mr. Burke, "the people is the true legislator; there are only two foundations of law,—equity and utility." This is especially true of the American States. The wants and welfare, the usages, customs, and settled notions of our people and their collected will necessarily find expression in our constitutions, statutes, and jural system. While the function of the judge is pre-eminently declarative, it is also necessarily, though subordinately, legislative; that is, he inevitably makes law in and by the very process of administering it. Whatever is of worth in this or in any legal work comes mainly from the judgments of the courts. The author desires to add that the work is purely technical, and is intended for the legal profession in every part of the country,—for lawyers who have no access to full libraries, as well as for those who have. For these reasons he has made the notes as full as practicable within the space allotted. If any shall complain of undue elaboration in this respect swelling the size of the book, the author craves leave to state it as his opinion that they probably constitute its most valuable and useful feature.

J. F. D.

New York, May, 1890.
PREFACE TO THIRD EDITION.

A REVISION of this Treatise has for some time been needed, but the pressure of other duties has, until recently, prevented its preparation. During the seven years that have elapsed since the last edition an unusual number of cases has been decided upon the various topics embraced in the work. The reported decisions to December 1, 1880, have all been diligently examined, and the results of such examination wrought into the texture of the present edition. This has necessarily increased its size, and correspondingly, it is hoped, its value. More than two hundred new sections have been written, and over three thousand additional cases cited. Every part has been gone over with conscientious care, and there is scarcely a section in which, either in the text or the notes, additions and changes have not been made. It has been necessary to sectionize the work anew, but the numbers of the former sections are enclosed in parentheses.

In consulting the Reports the author has been surprised and pleased to see the extent to which this Treatise has been used by lawyers and judges as an aid to their labors; and in again presenting it, in its new and altered shape, he gladly expresses once more his sincere and profound gratification for the favor with which it has been received.

J. F. D.

COLUMBIA COLLEGE LAW SCHOOL, NEW YORK,
January 1, 1881.
PREFACE TO SECOND EDITION.

The favor accorded to this Treatise by the profession is gratifying to the author, and compensates for the great labor of its preparation. Nothing can be more pleasing to an author than the knowledge that the studious care given to a work is appreciated by those for whom it was written: their approving opinion is the reward he covets and enjoys.

The First Edition, published about twelve months ago and of nearly double the usual size, has been exhausted, and at the request of the publishers the Second Edition has been prepared. As before, this has been the personal labor of the author. All reported cases, decided since the first publication, have been examined, and the text and notes prepared without the assistance of others. While this edition embraces a summary of recent cases to the latest date, and contains substantial additions, the structure of the work is unaltered. Some new sections have been added, and others re-written. The principal changes have been made in the chapters which treat of Municipal Securities, Taxes, and Assessments. The amount of negotiable bonds of municipalities largely exceeds the sum of the indebtedness of all the States, and it has been the earnest endeavor herein to exhibit accurately the American law upon this important subject.

In conclusion, it is deemed fitting to express to the Bench and Bar of the country a sincerely grateful appreciation of the favorable judgment already pronounced, and a hope that the same, upon further examination of the work, may be neither reversed nor modified.

Davenport, Iowa, 1873.

J. F. D.