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The Constitution of the United States, by James M. Beck

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The Constitution of the United States. By James M. Beck. With Foreword by President Coolidge. George H. Doran Company, New York. 1924. pp. 362.

Two quotations from this book may serve to give an insight into its general tenor better than pages of comments. On page 19, Mr. Beck says,

"Similarly the admiration with which the world has always regarded the Constitution of the United States should also be given to a people who had sufficient genius for government to create it and make it workable. There can be no successful constitution for any people unless it has a deep and vital sense of constitutional morality, and its essence is a spirit of self-restraint which is willing to subordinate the fleeting interests and ardent passions of the living moment to certain fundamental truths which are believed to be immutable."

And again, on page 317,

"And his solemn injunction comes to the present generation, which is fast wasting its precious heritage: 'Remove not the ancient Landmark, which the Fathers have set.' (PROVERBS XXII, 28)."

Mr. Beck is evidently a believer in natural law. Reference is made to immutable principles of law and morality, but little indication is given as to what these principles are or how they might be applied to present problems which confront the people of the United States. Any number of solutions are suggested by Mr. Beck himself, but there is no attempt to justify these suggested solutions by testing them on the anvil of natural law.

This book is not a treatise on the constitutional law of the United States. Nor is it a constitutional history of the United States. Neither could it be called a study in American Government. It partakes of something of each of these. There is besides, much of preaching and philosophy—one wonders whether Mr. Beck's philosophy or somebody's else.

Those who are interested in Mr. Beck's views of prize fighting will find them expressed on pages 262, 263, 265. Others who may be interested in the present status of newspapers in the United States will find that subject discussed in the pages immediately following the discussion of athletics on the above cited pages. For those who may wish to know what Mr. Beck thinks of present day industrial and economic tendencies, with a hint of his tastes in the field of art reference is made here to pages 301-308.

The first fifteen chapters contain a sketchy treatment of the constitutional history of the United States, or perhaps it should be called a sketch of the author's ideas as to the antecedents of the constitution and the forces which were at work in the making and developing of the government as it was established in 1789. Some of the material in these chapters is as good as that found in the average textbook, some is not so good. Chapter 16 is headed "The Political Philosophy of the Constitution." Chapter 18 deals with the Judiciary. Other chapters deal with Checks and Balances, Foreign Relations, etc. Beginning with chapter 21, from page 245 to 317 the reader is amused with the alternate denunciation and glorification of the American people. On one page he pays his highest respects to them, on the next he roundly berates them. Pages 321 to 357 contain an appendix in which will be found drafts of the Virginia and New Jersey Plans, the Constitution, Macaulay's correspondence with Randall, and Washington's appeal.

OLIVER P. FIELD.