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Famous Trials of History, by Rt. Honourable, The Earl of Birkenhead

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This book contains an untechnical account of twenty-three trials or series of trials, famous in English history or interesting because of the author’s first-hand account of his participation in them. The first trial described is that of Mary Queen of Scots. The last is the account of four years of litigation ending in 1906, in the Ogden’s Guinea Gold Cases, in which the author was engaged, resulting from a trade war between English and American cigarette companies. Other interesting trials include those of Captain Kidd, of Warren Hastings, and of Deacon Brodie. One chapter deals with the plot to murder Mr. Lloyd George, another with the Marconi scandal, and another with one phase of the famous Crippen murder case. Geographically, the settings include many scenes at sea, and in London, Jamaica, Southern Rhodesia, Liverpool and Canada. The author’s style is clear and direct; like that of a personal narrative. A lawyer reading the book will find himself wishing often for further information in regard to technical details and points of law, but the author’s preface shows his object is amusement and entertainment. How well he succeeds is indicated by the difficulty with which one lays down the book before finishing the reading of all of it.

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The first edition of this book published by Dean Hall in 1913 has been in almost universal use among American law schools where instruction in the law is given by the case method. Since constitutional law in this country deals with the interpretation of a written constitution whose terms are very brief and, in many cases, general in nature, it is inevitable that the constitutional law applied by the courts at any one time must be a different thing in its detailed content at least from the constitutional law applied by the same courts at other times. That is to say, the place of constitutional law may be thought of as remaining the same, but the situations and changing interests to which those principles must be applied in the rapidly changing economic and social conditions of our country make it inevitable that only the most recent cases will suffice to answer definite questions of constitutional interpretation. Thus it was most fortunate that Dean Hall prepared a second edition of his casebook since even the merits of the first edition could not have sufficed to make a useful tool for students unless the cases since 1913 were made available for their use. In his preface to the 1926 edition Dean Hall explains that the later cases are stated in a supplement at the end of the book although there are detailed references both for the case and the footnotes by which the instructor and the student may fit them into the proper pages in the original casebook itself. Dean Hall expressed the hope that at an early date he could blend the supplement into the main casebook with a reduction in the number of pages required and with the addition of many further ref-