

HON. RICHARD LAW OF NEW LONDON, CT.

[This memoir was obtained through the instrumentality of Prof. Kingsley of Yale College.]

Richard Law was a son of the Hon. Jonathan Law, Governor of Connecticut, was born at Milford, on the 17th of March, 1733. He was educated at Yale College, where he graduated in 1751, and where also he received the degree of LL. D. Immediately after graduating, he entered upon the study of the law, in the office and under the instruction of that able jurist and accomplished lawyer, the Hon. Jared Ingersoll; and after a course of studies usual at that day, he was, soon after the age of 21, admitted to the bar, at New Haven; and immediately removed, and settled at New London, where he became highly distinguished in his profession. As an advocate at the bar, his style was pure and correct, but not copious and flowing. He was distinguished more as a learned lawyer, a close logician, a fair special pleader, than an eloquent orator. His talents were better adapted to a court than a jury. He possessed discrimination, and power of seeing and seizing the great point in the case—the point on which it must turn; and by a course of special pleadings—by drawing on the "heartstrings of the law," he had a faculty of presenting his point, by forming an issue in law for the decision of the court, most favorably for his client; and on such issues, from the logical structure of his mind, he was powerful. He was thoroughly read in the ancient English law authorities; and few American lawyers or jurists, of his day and age, better understood the great principles of the English common law, or could better discriminate between such of those principles as were applicable to the genius of a republican government, and such as were not, than Judge Law. Those which he adopted formed, as it respected the common law, the polestar of his judicial decisions.

After a full and lucrative practice of several years, in consequence of ill health, he was induced to relinquish the bar, and accept a seat as Chief Judge on the Bench of the County Court for the county of New London. This office he held until May, 1784, when he was appointed one of the Judges of the Superior Court.

In May, 1776, he was chosen an Assistant, a member of the Council or upper house of Assembly, which office he held by annual elections of the freemen, until May, 1786, when an act was passed excluding Judges from a seat in the Legislature.

In 1777, it is believed that at May session, he was appointed by the General Assembly a member of Congress; and continued with little, if any intermission, a member of that body until 1782.

On granting the charter to the city of New London, he was by the freemen in March, 1784, unanimously chosen Mayor; which office he held until his death—a period of nearly twenty-two years.

On the return of peace, after the Revolution, he was appointed with the Hon. Roger Sherman,

to revise the code of Statute Laws of the State. This code had not been revised for thirty years, and had accumulated to a great size, from the great variety of statutes[281] enacted in the emergencies of the Revolution. In its subjects of correction, a work of great interest and importance, it required no small ability so to select and discriminate as to give universal satisfaction. In the discharge of which duty he discovered great knowledge of the science of legislation, and the true principles of national government.

In May, 1786, he was appointed Chief Judge of the Superior Court; and continued in that office until the adoption of the Constitution of the United States; when being by President Washington appointed District Judge of the District of Connecticut, in October 1789, he resigned the former and accepted the latter, which he held until his death, which occurred at New London, Jan. 26, 1806, in the 73rd year of his age.

Judge Law lived in an eventful period in his country, and of the world; and the many and various important offices that he held and honorably sustained through the course of a long life, better bespeak, than language can express the character, worth, and merits of the man.

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