

## CHAPTER II

### THE CONSTITUTIONAL MONARCHY

WHEN we try to distinguish a ruler who acts according to the wishes of his people, from an autocrat, or ruler who acts according to his own view of what is right, we speak of him as a 'constitutional monarch.' Evidently the terms are not precise; for more than one ruler whom we call 'autocratic' is subject to a good many restrictions which he cannot violate without breaking the law, while some 'constitutional' rulers exercise a good deal of personal discretion in the discharge of their offices. Nevertheless, in spite of doubtful cases, the distinction is well understood; but it is very often not in the least understood how or in what way a particular ruler has become 'constitutional,' how, in fact, his personal will is guided and controlled by the wishes of his subjects. Inasmuch as the British monarchy is, actually and historically, the most conspicuous example of a constitutional monarchy in the world, it is peculiarly a good case for study. And, as so often happens, there is no clearer way of realizing the present state of things than by seeing how it came about.

### HEREDITARY KINGSHIP

It may sound a little startling, to say that one of the earliest causes of the constitutional nature of the British monarchy was its hereditary character. Yet