

Kings, Lords and Commons of the present day.

The author gives an interesting account of the increasing and encroaching influence of the Sovereigns from the time of the Norman Kings down to the reign of the second Stuart, when the overwhelming power of the kingly office received its death blow; upon which followed the development of constitutional government and the increasing influence of the Council, known afterwards as the Cabinet Council, which since the time of the Saxons and up to the time of Wm. III., had been more or less "a pliant instrument in the hands of the reigning monarch, but was made responsible to Parliament by the Revolution of 1688."

In the second chapter the present position, history, powers and responsibilities of the Privy Council under parliamentary government are discussed, and here the attention of the reader is drawn to the main distinction between the Privy Council and the Cabinet Council:—

"Ever since the separate existence of the Cabinet Council as a governmental body, meetings of the Privy Council have ceased to be holden, for purposes of deliberation. At the commencement of the reign of George III., we find this distinction between the two councils clearly recognised—that the one is assembled for deliberative, and the other merely for formal and ceremonial purposes. It is, in fact, an established principle, that 'it would be contrary to constitutional practice that the sovereign should preside at any council where deliberation or discussion takes place.'

At meetings of the Privy Council, the sovereign occupies the chair. The President of the Council sits at the Queen's left hand; it being noticeable that this functionary 'does not possess the authority usually exercised by the president of a court of justice.' (Vol. I., p. 58.)

The administrative functions of the Privy Council, as a Department of State, are also fully explained in another part of the work.

The author in the 3rd chapter, returning from the general survey of the King's Councils under prerogative government, proceeds to discuss the rise, progress, and present condition of the Cabinet Council, the supreme governing body in the political system of Great Britain. The ground occupied in this chapter is entirely new, and the reader will look in vain in any other work for the information which is to be found in this chapter,—and it has been no idle head or hand that has so exhausted the subject and arranged his material in such a lucid shape.

In speaking of the office of Prime Minister he says:—

"The development of the office of Prime Minister in the hands of men who combine the highest qualities of statesmanship with great administrative and parliamentary experience—such as Sir Robert Walpole, the two Pitts, and Sir Robert Peel—has contributed materially to the growth and perfection of parliamentary government. Before the Revolution, the king himself was the main-spring of the State, and the one who shaped and directed the national policy. If he invoked the assistance of wiser men in this undertaking, it was that they might help him to mature his own plans, not that they might rule under the shadow of his name. With the overthrow of prerogative government all this was changed. When the king was obliged to frame his policy so as to conciliate the approbation of Parliament, it became necessary that his chief advisers should be statesmen in whom Parliament could confide. And no ministers will accept responsibility unless they are free to offer such advice as they think best, and to retire from office, if they are required to do anything which they cannot endorse. In every ministry, moreover, the opinions of the strongest man must ultimately prevail. Thus, by an easy gradation, the personal authority of the sovereign under prerogative government receded into the background, and was replaced by the supremacy of the Prime Minister under parliamentary government. In the transition period which immediately succeeded the Revolution, William III., by virtue of his capacity for rule, as well as of his kingly office, was the actual head and chief controller of his own ministries. But the monarchs who succeeded him upon the throne of England were vastly his inferiors in the art of government. George I. was unable to converse in the English language, and, therefore, disabled from a systematic interference in administrative details. His son, though less incapable, was conscious of his imperfect knowledge of domestic affairs, and, like his father, directed his attention almost exclusively to foreign politics. This tended to reduce the personal authority of the sovereign to a very low ebb, and in the same proportion to increase the influence and authority of the cabinet. But with the accession of George III. a reaction, begun in the preceding reign, set in for a time. Anxious to prove himself a faithful and efficient ruler, and being well qualified for the discharge of the functions of royalty, George III. lost no opportunity of aggrandising his office. Whereupon the power of the crown, which had been weakened and obscured by the ignorance and indifference of his immediate predecessors, became once more predominant. Not satisfied, however, with the exercise of his undoubted authority, the king repeatedly overstepped the lawful bounds of prerogative and the acknowledged limits of his exalted station. It was reserved for William Pitt, whose pre-eminent abilities as First Minister of the