

Every age has to provide against its own difficulties and the dangers which beset it. Possibly there were special reasons for the extension of feudal institutions at one period of history which are unappreciated in another. We are not called upon to enquire whether feudalism was a necessity or a supposed necessity in the ages when war and conquest were the chief pursuits of mankind. We have only to recognise that these institutions at one time universally prevailed, in order to account for the marvellous influence they have had in determining much of our present political condition. The habit of thought of earlier generations is still to some extent rooted in our national life, and hence it is that we have long tried with but partial success to engraft our modern requirements on the traditions of the past.

It has been remarked that it was owing to the superimposition at the conquest of continental feudalism without any formal change in the English laws and Kingship, which determined much of the later features of English history. The despotism imposed by William under legal forms crushed Saxon national life but it did not obliterate Saxon laws; so likewise in the 13th century, and in succeeding centuries, when the old national spirit was evoked, to regain some concessions of the early freedom, the super-imposed feudalism remained, at least in form. The political fabric was never wholly demolished and rebuilt; the old walls were conserved and in some parts reconstructed and improved. Hence arises much of the divergence between the legal and the actual, between fiction and fact, in our modern constitution. Hence the peculiar features of the traditional forms which cling to and characterise our parliamentary system.

There is indeed a long chain of causes extending over centuries which has operated in producing the parliamentary system and the electoral form and practices, as we find them established. Not a few of them spring from the feudal age rather than from the age of freedom which preceded the reign of feudalism. If therefore we attempt to solve the problem set before us, we must reject all that is baneful inherited from feudal times, and seek to rectify our national assembly on the early Teutonic model, so that every member of the community, by right entitled as were Saxon freemen of old, may have a voice in his own government. If it be an understood principle of our constitution that power and authority proceed from the people, it should be our aim to see that that fundamental principle is something more than a delusive fiction. At present our representation system is so imperfectly developed that we have but a figment of popular government, and no true responsible government. The Ministry is practically responsible to only one section of the House of Commons, the representatives of a comparatively small portion of the whole electorate. The Ministry is not and cannot be responsible to the people or the representatives of the people in Parliament seeing that the people as a whole is without representation.

With these brief remarks bearing on the origin of Parliament, its slow and imperfect development, and its need of rectification the writer respectfully submits a draft of a measure embracing the principles by which as he believes, the Canadian electorate may be fairly represented in the popular assembly, and each individual voter may through Parliament have due weight in the government of the country.

The first section of the Bill is a humble and respectful recognition of the symbol of Power and authority, represented by the Sovereign who stands at the head of our constitution. We cannot ignore the force of association and the prevailing attachment to the Crown. The Canadian people cling with confidence to the Monarchical character of government which had its origin not so much in the feudal days as in the age anterior to feudalism. In theory and practice it has happily become blended with our representative democracy. Beyond this recognition of the Crown, the measure submitted is limited in its range to the election of Members of the House of Commons. There is no reference to the Second Chamber, the Senate, with respect to which it may be remarked that we have not, as in England a powerful aristocracy, as a rule carefully trained and educated with a view to the station they have in after life to fill and the duties to perform, not the least important of which is that attendant on a seat in the House of Lords. Nevertheless the Canadian Senate by judicious appointments may become, as at one time that of Rome, an assembly of statesmen who have previously held high office, or in some cases have proved themselves, by their experience, capacity and patriotism, worthy occupants of the exalted position.

The first section of the Bill provides for the appointment of electoral officers. The highest officer proposed is an Electoral Commissioner, who as a Minister or Deputy Minister of the Crown would be held responsible for the proper regulation of all matters in his department. The other officers acting under him, would assist in carrying into effect the provisions of the Bill, the Commissioner and his deputies being governed by the Orders in Council from time to time issued for their guidance.

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