

(Stuart) branch of the Royal House, and conferred the Crown upon the descendants of the Electress Sophia of Hanover, the grand-daughter of James I, 'being Protestants.' The first two monarchs who held the throne under this Act were born abroad, and knew and cared little about British affairs. They were, necessarily, bound to rely almost entirely on their Ministers for information and advice; and, so long as certain privileges and income were secured to them, they were content to let these Ministers do pretty much what they pleased. It saved trouble, and came to much the same thing in the end. But these Ministers were themselves not in a very easy position. They knew that the exiled Stuart family, and its numerous supporters, denied altogether the validity of the Revolution which had seated William of Orange on the throne, and, therefore, the validity of the Act of Settlement. These 'Jacobites,' as they were called, upheld the doctrine of Divine Right, by which the crown was claimed as the direct gift of Heaven, and, therefore, incapable of being taken away from its 'legitimate' wearer, and were prepared to treat as traitors all persons, and especially Ministers of State, who supported the new line. Naturally unwilling to lose their heads, the Ministers of George I and George II not only banded themselves, in spite of many jealousies, firmly together, but made it their especial business (we need not enquire too closely by what means) to maintain a majority in Parliament, and especially in the House of Commons, of that 'Whig' party which supported the Hanoverian line against the Tories and Jacobites. To do this, they were, of course, obliged to take the House into their confidence, and obtain its approval for their policy; and Sir Robert Walpole's act, in 1742, when he resigned office the moment a vote in the House of Commons went against him, is justly regarded as marking the definite establishment of the famous Cabinet System, which rests on two great principles,