

CHANGES IN CHARACTER OF KINGSHIP

Meanwhile, however, the relation of the British monarch to his subjects had undergone a change no less remarkable than the increase of his territorial rule. It is well known, of course, that, ever since the close of the thirteenth century, Parliament had been a permanent national institution with gradually increasing powers. On more than one occasion, for example, it had changed the succession to the throne. It had established itself as the sole authority in matters of taxation, and gained the right to be consulted in all important changes of the law. But it was not until the seventeenth century that it definitely challenged (first in the Civil War, then in the Revolution) the ill-defined 'prerogatives, or special privileges, of the Crown, and established itself as the supreme representative of the national will. Then it was that, by accepting the throne on the definite terms of a great Parliamentary statute, known as the 'Bill of Rights,' in 1688, William of Orange and his consort not merely recognized the fact that Parliament shared equally in the establishment of the Kingship, but, in effect, admitted that the final disposal of the throne lay with Parliament. This truth was admitted again, in an equally unmistakable way, when, on the failure of the Revolution line in 1714, the Elector of Hanover, the great-grandson of James I and the direct ancestor of his present Majesty, accepted the throne on the terms of the Act of Settlement of 1700, which implied an acceptance of the whole of the existing rules of British law and custom. This event was rapidly followed by the introduction of that Cabinet System of government which, as will be presently explained (Chapter V), whilst carefully cherishing the Crown as the symbol of Imperial unity and authority, protects it from attack by providing that, for every act of

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