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Advisory Role

Finally, the Department, under Dr. Skelton's direction, began to play a role, hitherto almost negligible, of an advisory agency to the policy-framing Prime Minister and Cabinet. Dr. Skelton was not only, like Sir Joseph Pope, a departmental administrative head; he became, with the assistance of some of his counsellors, an adviser on foreign policy and external relations. Because of his endowments and personality, that advisory role grew and extended. As a corollary, the Prime Minister, as Secretary of State for External Affairs, came to lean more and more heavily on the Department ("inextricably interwoven" with his own Prime Minister's Office) both for advice, and for professional services of its staff.

To a large degree, the Department, in this advisory role, continued to be a one-man organism. There were, until the Second World War, relatively few senior personnel in the Department at home. Dr. Skelton himself was temperamentally disinclined to delegate work to other staff, and tried, with ever-increasing strain on his health, to keep departmental affairs in his own hands. He became so much the key man, and so personally influential, that he was sometimes described as the "deputy prime minister". In the organizational arch he was the indispensable key-stone. In his advisory capacity, he was consulted