

A Study in Canadian Citizenship

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Canada and the Empire.

A great deal of abstract discussion on the problem of Canada's relation to Great Britain and to the British Empire has been carried on in recent years. The difficulty, however, with abstract discussion of this kind is that, being essentially aimless, it seldom leads anywhere in practical politics. The method of controversy, especially the method of partisan controversy, is perhaps the poorest of all methods of discovering truth of any kind. For fifteen hundred years the mediaeval schoolmen carried on the most learned, abstruse discussions on some of the simplest ideas of science, and yet scientific inquiry made little or no progress in the discovery of real truth until it turned away from the method of controversy and began to adopt the method of impartial observation and study. Personally I have felt for years past that the application of straight-forward, impartial, scientific methods to the study of political problems is one of the greatest needs of our time. What with the press, the platform and Parliament, the method

of contention and abstract discourse has been carried beyond all reasonable bounds in matters of public policy. We are living in a world of words which has become more complex and mountainous than the original world of realities it was meant to mean. We have so inflated our word coinage that no profitable exchange of ideas is any longer possible. The result is necessarily almost complete confusion. What is really needed is a great deal more careful study of the real facts and a good deal less aimless talking. It is only by first looking all the facts, all the evidence, all the significant surrounding circumstances of each problem full in the face that the human mind is able to detect the real truth or falsehood of things. A careful preliminary analysis of the existing facts of Canada's relation to the Motherland, therefore, becomes necessary. Until that is done no progress is possible.

The constitutional facts, the links then, which bind Canada and the Motherland together at present are six in number, viz.: (1) the Crown, (2) the Governor-General of Canada,

(3) the Judicial Committee of the King's Privy Council, usually called the Privy Council, (4) the Power of the Imperial Parliament to make laws for the whole Empire, (5) the Provisions contained in the British North America Act, by which The King acting upon the suggestion of the Colonial Office and the advice of his Imperial ministers at London may veto or disallow laws enacted by the Federal Parliament of Canada at Ottawa and (6) The Imperial Conferences. Let us look at each of these briefly in turn.

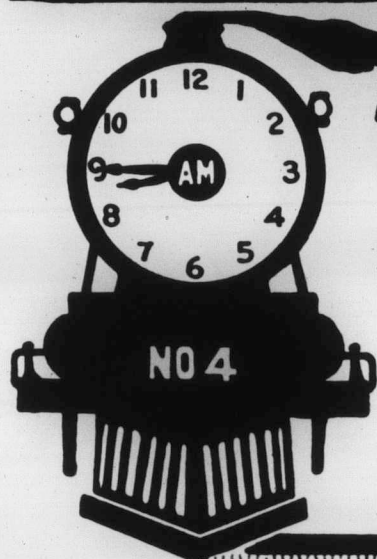
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The Crown.

By "The Crown" we mean constitutionally the reigning sovereign, at present King George V., acting within the ambit of his office as chief magistrate. The Crown—I am now for the moment thinking of the physical object, the ornate headgear made of gold and precious jewels—is really, as you know, like the throne and sceptre only a symbol or title the possession of which is recognized as proof or evidence of the right to occupy the office of acting chief magistrate under the monarchical system. This figure of speech, then, this fiction, once clearly kept in mind, no further confusion need arise on this point. The real question is what powers do in fact fall within the ambit of the office of chief magistrate under a limited monarchy such as ours. What personal powers has the King to make or to influence the making of laws for the peace, order and good government of the people? How far is the personal will and pleasure of the King a factor in the government of the Kingdom? The answer to this question is really only to be found in a long story of human history, science and sentiment. Only a few simple facts can be indicated or pointed out in this outline.

The constitutional history of Great Britain, then, is little more or less than the long story by which an absolute monarchy under William the Norman became an almost absolutely limited monarchy under George the Fifth. Little by little, one by one, decade after decade, century after century, usually by methods of peaceful persuasion, once and again by force of arms, the personal powers of the reigning sovereign were taken from him by charter, by law and by custom, and finally vested now in his ministers, now in his judges, now in Parliament and now in the electoral people until at the present time only a few vanishing vestiges of his once despotic power remain within his power. It is only in a very few minor matters, such as the tentative choice of a Prime Minister in a crisis, that the King now exercises any real powers of government of his own personal will and pleasure. It is for this reason that we sometimes speak of the King as a mere figurehead. This epithet, however, is scarcely accurate. It is true no doubt, on the one hand, that the King's duties are almost exclusively merely formal and signatory, but, on

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