

Extract from Parliamentary Debates

British House of Commons,

Dec. 4, 1936, page 1621

Constitutional Position

Mr. Attlee: "I should like to ask the Prime Minister whether he has anything to add to the answer he gave to the Question I put to him at the beginning of to-day's proceedings."

The Prime Minister: "Yes. Sir. In view of widely circulated suggestions as to certain possibilities in the event of the King's marriage, I think it would be advisable for me to make a statement. Suggestions have appeared in certain organs of the Press yesterday and again to-day that if the King decided to marry, his wife need not become Queen. These ideas are without any Constitutional foundation. There is no such thing as what is called a morganatic marriage known to our law. The Royal Marriages Act of 1772 has no application to the Sovereign himself. Its only effect is that the marriage of any other member of the Royal Family is null and void unless the Sovereign's consent, declared under the Great Seal, is first obtained. This Act, therefore, has nothing to do with the present case. The King himself requires no consent from any other authority to make his marriage legal, but, as I have said, the lady whom he marries, by the fact of her marriage to the King, necessarily becomes Queen. She herself, therefore, enjoys all the status, rights and privileges which, both by positive law and by custom, attach to that position, and with which we are familiar in the cases of Her Late Majesty Queen Alexandra and of Her Majesty Queen Mary, and her children would be in the direct line of succession to the Throne.

The only possible way in which this result could be avoided would be by legislation dealing with a particular case. His Majesty's Government are not prepared to introduce such legislation. Moreover, the matters to be dealt with are of common concern to the Commonwealth as a whole, and such a change could not be effected without the assent of all the Dominions. I am satisfied, from inquiries I have made, that this assent would not be forthcoming. I have felt it right to make this statement before the House adjourns to-day in order to remove a widespread misunderstanding. At this moment I have no other statement to make."

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