

Genesis and Evolution of the Cabinet

THE origination and development of the modern cabinet as exemplified in Canada is not likely to enlist the attention of the average man; its existence is sufficiently satisfying, and he has no desire to delve into its history during preceding ages; if its policy conflicts with his interests he censures it, if it aids his interests materially he praises it. But to the philosopher and student of history, the study of the early formation of the cabinet offers a wide and varied range for intelligent consideration of the primitive modes and processes of government.

As the present form of government in Canada is a product and a heritage of the British system, it follows quite naturally that to form a proper idea of the Canadian cabinet we must first consider the origin, rise and advancement of the British cabinet. It has been a singular characteristic of the constitutional history of England, that her political growth has been one of incessant development,—a remarkable continuity existing from the first settlement of the Jutes to the present time. All the way through it is a history of almost insensible change, of slow modification, and seemingly unconscious development. Very few changes of importance can be given exact dates, since the process of development advanced so slowly; notwithstanding this fact, however, there is a marked contrast in the character of government in one age and in a succeeding age a century or more later.

The year 449 A.D. witnessed the first Teutonic settlement of permanency, in Britain. Vortigern, a British prince, being unable to cope successfully with the Picts and Scots, entreated the aid of the Jutes, who were hovering near the coast, under the leadership of Hengist and Horsa. With the assistance of the Jutes, the Northern invaders were easily defeated; as a reward for their services, Vortigern gave them a portion of Kent. Shortly afterwards, when the Jutes fully realized the weak condition of the Britons, they invited their Teutonic brethren, the Angles and the Saxons, to assist them in the conquest of Britain. They were so far successful that, after a century and a half of relentless and bloody warfare, the remnants of the British race were compelled to seek refuge in the fastnesses of the North and in the wilds of Wales and Cornwall. Tradition has it that King Arthur and his "Table Round" lived during this period, and led the Britons against the hosts of the invaders.