

And yet, while on the surface a political revolution seemed about to be precipitated, it cannot be doubted that there was a fixed determination on the part of the great majority of the people not to break with the British Crown.

We have seen, and shall further see, that prior to the Victorian Era there had been no enlightened colonial polity within the limits of the British Empire; but a sketch of the development of the Colonial Office, as one of the principal departments of the Imperial Government, is necessary to a comprehension of the progressive system which has been worked out by the greatest colonizing power the world has ever seen. In these opening days of the Twentieth Century, colonies grow in importance, and in demand almost hourly. Even republics stretch out mailed hands across the seas to grasp an island here, an island there, or a peninsula somewhere else: isthmian canals are part of the scheme, and so are transcontinental railways, and Cape-to-Cairo routes. To-day, the main motives of international alliances, is the acquisition, retention, and development of colonial possessions. Great Britain, the United States, and Germany, in commercial advance of other nations, find their interests and ambitions running along one and the same line, and are naturally in accord. France and Russia have common interests in the Orient—to disturb England in India, and to widen their spheres of influence in China. Italy finds an alliance with England advantageous on account of African ambitions. Thus, it may be stated that the foreign or international policies of the Great Powers have come to depend more and more upon colonial possessions. It is for this reason that the Colonial Office, as an eminent state department, is distinctly a product of the Victorian Age.

To go back to its very beginnings: the first separate organization for the central administration of colonial affairs was a committee of the Privy Council "for the plantacons," instituted in November, 1660. A month later a "Council of Foreign Plantations" was created by Letters Patent. A few years later, in 1672, this special council was united to a Council for Trade, and the two together were known thenceforth as the "Council for Trade and Plantations." In 1677, this joint council was suppressed and its