

Canada by the fathers of confederation, which conference was arranged upon an entirely different basis from the one that took place in London recently. In the conference preceding confederation all the great political parties of Canada were represented. Look at that famous picture *The Fathers of Confederation* if you want assurance on this point. In that picture we see the outstanding figure of the late Sir John A. Macdonald together with one who probably was the next most important figure, the Honourable George Brown; while side by side we see Sir Charles Tupper and Sir Oliver Mowat. All sections of the four provinces at that time were represented, likewise all political parties. Long meetings were held, prolonged discussions took place; until finally our forefathers agreed upon what has proved a most satisfactory arrangement for Canada. Now there is in this country a strong body of public opinion which holds the view that constitutional conferences should be managed upon just such a basis and not otherwise. There should be full and careful preparation; there should be due notice; there should be ample consultation, with all sections of the people of Canada before any effort is made to institute radical constitutional changes. I do not believe that the people even of Great Britain contemplated any serious constitutional changes. In my opinion both statesmen and press of Great Britain agreed that constitutional government in the overseas dominions had for many years been a matter of evolutionary growth and that all that was necessary was to prepare a clear statement of the situation as it had actually existed for over a generation, a declaration of the actual status quo as it was to-day and as it had been for years. The statesmen and the press of Great Britain, in my opinion, felt assured that this would be fully satisfactory to all parties concerned.

There is no question that apart from our written constitution, which we know in this House as the *British North America Act*, there have been great constitutional changes in Canada. Our written constitution as contained in the *British North America Act* has been added to in very many instances by conventions, by customs and by practices which have grown to be a part of our constitution and which are just as strong as the letter of the statute. This constitutional growth must be regarded in considering the Canadian constitution as it exists to-day. Anyone who so desires may examine the reports of the various constitutional conferences which have been held in the past and trace

through them the gradual growth and development of the Canadian constitution as we have it to-day, both in relation to the government of this country and also in regard to our position in the British Empire in general.

The first of these conferences was held in London in 1888, but it was not a conference as we understand the term to-day. It was a meeting summoned by the Colonial Office of Great Britain to discuss certain matters pertaining to the empire, chiefly matters of defence. No minister of this government attended that conference, and no material result came from it. The next conference was called by the government of this country. It was held at Ottawa; it was attended by representatives of Australia, as then constituted; of New Zealand, and of Cape Colony—there was no confederation of South Africa at that time—and of the Dominion of Canada, while the British government sent out Lord Jersey to watch the proceedings on behalf of Great Britain and the Colonial Office. That conference met in Ottawa in 1894 for the purpose of conferring—because that is the real meaning of the word conference,—and I suppose for the purpose of consulting and advising also. It had no other rights, no other duties and no other authority. The conference did pass a number of resolutions, chiefly in regard to trade matters, and on the whole performed a very useful work, but it did not attempt to elaborate any problems of government either in Canada or outside of Canada.

The next conference was called in 1897, the jubilee year of Her Majesty the late Queen Victoria. It was attended by Sir Wilfrid Laurier on behalf of Canada, and was the first real conference held in Great Britain. It is true that it was not such a conference as we have to-day; it was not attended by the government of Great Britain, but by the Colonial Secretary and by the prime ministers of the self-governing dominions. In the report of that conference you will see that even so early as 1897 the self-governing rights of overseas dominions were fully recognized. Sir Wilfrid Laurier was most particular to emphasize this point in his statement to the conference, and all present accepted this position, as a matter upon which there could be no possible objection.

The next conference was held in 1902, the year of the coronation of His Majesty the late King Edward VII. Similarly, the proceedings of that conference disclosed that Sir Wilfrid Laurier was again most active in impressing this upon the conference, that it had no duty and no right to deal with constitu-