

I.—THE CONSTITUTION AND GOVERNMENT OF CANADA.

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The Dominion of Canada is the largest in area and the most populous of the great self-governing Dominions of the British Empire, which also include the Commonwealth of Australia, the Union of South Africa, the Dominion of New Zealand and the island colony of Newfoundland (with Labrador). These Dominions enjoy responsible government of the British type, administered by Executive Councils (or Cabinets) acting as advisors to the representative of the Sovereign, themselves responsible to and possessing the confidence of the representatives elected to Parliament by the people, and giving place to other persons more acceptable to Parliament whenever that confidence is shown to have ceased to exist.

Of these Dominions, Canada, Australia and South Africa extend over enormous areas of territory, the first two approximating in area to Europe. Each section has its own problems and its own point of view, so that local parliaments for each section, as well as the central parliament for the whole country, are required. These local parliaments, established when transportation and communication were more difficult and expensive than at present, were chronologically prior to the central body, to which on its formation they either resigned certain powers, as in the case of Australia, or surrendered all their powers with certain specified exceptions, as in Canada and South Africa. Of such local Parliaments, Canada at the present time has nine, Australia six and South Africa four.

As regards the division of powers between central and local legislatures, Canada stands midway between the two more recently formed federations of the Empire. The founders of the Dominion of Canada, constituted as it was under the shadow of the great Civil War in the United States, aimed at settling once for all the issues of State rights, State sovereignty and the right of the State to secede from the Union, which had occasioned so much bloodshed in the neighbouring republic. They created, therefore, a strong federation where the residue of power appertained to the central rather than to the local authorities and where the central power could legally disallow, in the general interest of Canada, the legislation of the local Parliaments, even when these were admittedly acting within their reserved powers.

It is a curious paradox of political science that whereas in Canada, a bi-lingual country inhabited by peoples of different races and religions, it should have been possible to establish a strong central government, the founders of the Commonwealth of Australia, which had a practically homogeneous population throughout the six States of the Commonwealth, should only have been able to establish a relatively weak federation of the American type with the residual powers in the hands of the States, among which all surplus Commonwealth revenue was to be divided.