

CHAPTER III.—CONSTITUTION AND GOVERNMENT.

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 Irish Free State (Saorstát Éireann), the Commonwealth of Australia, the Union of South Africa, the Dominion of New Zealand, the island colony of Newfoundland (with the Labrador coast), the colony of Southern Rhodesia, and the island of Malta. 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. The Imperial Conference of 1926 defined the Dominions as "autonomous Communities within the British Empire, equal in status, in no way subordinate one to another in any aspect of their domestic or foreign affairs, though united by a common allegiance to the Crown, and freely associated as members of the British Commonwealth of Nations". The Conference further laid down that, as a consequence of this equality of status, the Governor-General of a Dominion "is the representative of the Crown, holding in all essential respects the same position in relation to the administration of public affairs in the Dominion as is held by His Majesty the King in Great Britain", and that "it is the right of the Government of each Dominion to advise the Crown in all matters relating to its own affairs". The Conference also recognized certain treaty-making rights as appertaining to the Dominions.

Of these Dominions, Canada, Australia and South Africa extend over enormous areas of territory, the first two approximating in area to Europe, and including great provinces or states larger than most of its Great Powers. Each province or state 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.

Besides the Dominions above enumerated, the great Empire of India has internationally been accepted as a member of the League of Nations, and in its internal administration has been placed on the road, formerly traversed by the Dominions which are now fully self-governing, towards responsible government. Indeed, the whole evolution of the Empire, throughout all its parts which are more than mere fortresses like Gibraltar or trading stations like Hong Kong, is in the direction of responsible government, to be attained in the dependencies as it has been in what used to be called the colonies, by the gradual extension of self-government in proportion to the growing capacities of their respective populations. It is the recognized aim of British administrators, by the extension of educational facilities and by just administration, to develop these capacities to the utmost, so that in the dependencies, as well as in the Dominions and in the Mother Country, the constitutional history of the future may be a record of "freedom slowly broadening down from precedent to precedent".