

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 representatives of the Sovereign, the Executive Councils being 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 group of self-governing communities consisting of Great Britain and 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. At the Imperial Conference of 1930 the constitutional status of the Dominions was further strengthened by the decisions to repeal the Colonial Laws Validity Act and to establish a voluntary Empire judicial tribunal. It was also definitely laid down that the King appoints his Governors General through the Dominion Governments. An Address of the Parliament of Canada to His Majesty was adopted by the House of Commons on June 30, and by the Senate on July 6, 1931, praying for the enactment by the Parliament of the United Kingdom of the Statute of Westminster removing the remaining legal limitations under the Colonial Laws Validity Act of 1895, the Merchant Shipping Act of 1894 and the Colonial Courts of Admiralty Act of 1890 on the legislative autonomy of the Dominions. In compliance with this Address and similar Addresses from the Parliaments of other Dominions, the Parliament of the United Kingdom having enacted legislation to this effect, the Royal Assent was given thereto on Dec. 12, 1931.

Of the Dominions, Canada, Australia and South Africa extend over enormous areas of territory, each of 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.