

Unusually thoughtful essay!

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Class A

Subject

The Importance of the King in the Commonwealth

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The Importance of the King in the British Commonwealth.

The British Commonwealth

The British Commonwealth to-day consists of Great Britain; six dominions - Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Newfoundland, the Union of South Africa, and the Irish Free State; an empire - India, and a great number of crown colonies, colonies, protectorates, protected states, and mandated territories; with an area of 13,000,000 square miles, that is, a quarter of the earth's land surface, and a population of 500,000,000, a quarter of the world's population. And what an amazing union it is!

In the case of the dominions, Great Britain and they are, by the declaration of 19th November 1926, "autonomous communities within the British Empire, equal in status, in no way subordinate one to another....." Thus, in this case, the Commonwealth is, in one way, a federation of independent states; and yet it is not altogether that, since Great Britain and they have the same King. King George VI is King of Canada, King of Australia, and of all the others, besides King of Great Britain. The position is similar to that when George I was Elector of Hanover and King of England, except that in this case the states had nothing whatsoever to do with one another. The point of the King's being King of each of the dominions separately is demonstrated by the fact that, legally, King George the Sixth did not become King of each one on the same day; he became King of South Africa one day before most of the others, and King of the Irish Free State one day after them. The six dominions have not even a common Federal parliament to direct their policies; each has a separate Parliament.

India is an Empire within an Empire; it is destined to become a dominion, and already has ~~the~~ some dominion privileges, but the British Government retains direct control of the execution, while the Viceroy has certain powers regarding essential legislation.

Certain of the colonies, such as Malta and Rhodesia, possess responsible government, in these the British Government has only a

into on legislation and controls no official but the Governor. Other colonies, such ^{as} ~~and~~ Bermuda and Bahamas, possess representative government. In these the Crown has more power of legislation, and retains control of the public offices. Crown colonies are those in which the legislature is controlled by an executive containing a majority of Crown officials, owing to the native population being unfit for political activity.

Protectorates, such as Somaliland, differ from crown colonies in that their inhabitants are not British subjects, and that the territory does not belong to the Crown. Protected States, such as Sarawak, are those which preserve their legal identity, British officials acting in the name of the rulers of the various countries. And Mandated Territories are former German colonies held by Britain under League of Nations mandate. Britain has complete control of them, but is answerable to the League of Nations.

From this it can be seen that the British Commonwealth is a loose collection of states and peoples in extremely varying stages of independence and advancement; it is this, as will be seen later, which makes the King such an important and valuable - perhaps indispensable - official.

The long-standing connexion between the King and his Empire probably has its roots in the similarity between the development of the mother-country, and the growth of the Empire. On the collapse of feudalism, the state grew up around the monarch, who embodied the supreme power; when his dominions were extended, he was naturally the link between them and the original state. In this way the United Kingdom became one; and the growth of the Empire around the mother-country is the same development on a much larger scale. In this case, too, the King is the main, if not the only, link between the old and the new domains, especially nowadays ~~that~~ when the dominions' governments have no connexion at all with the British Government.

It remains to be seen whether any other relationship, carefully worked out, in contradistinction to the gradually-augmented,

heterogeneous mass of concessions which forms the government to-day, would be strong enough to stand up to the strain which would be placed upon it.

The Value of the King in Great Britain

For the purpose of determining the value of the King in Great Britain, it would perhaps be as well to look upon him in two different ways: firstly, as the hereditary monarch, and secondly, as the man, the King.

Let us consider the advantages of the hereditary monarchy. It is extremely valuable to have an unchanging element in the state, especially at its head. Amid ever-varying politics and parties the sovereign stands as a visible expression of the continuity of the life of the nation; he represents the permanent essential features of the nation.

Even more important is the detachment of the monarch from political parties, which has the advantage of giving him a position of strict impartiality. This can rarely be the case with a president, who is almost invariably the nominee of, or a past prominent leader of, one or another political faction. In times of crisis, when the slightest suspicion of partisanship by the head of the state would be disastrous, the superiority of a hereditary monarchy has been repeatedly demonstrated.

Brett: "The Story of the British Constitution"

Now let us think of him as the man, the King; Bagehot wrote: "The Sovereign has, under a constitutional monarchy such as ours, three rights — the right to be consulted, the right to encourage, and the right to warn. And a King of great sagacity would want no others....." In the course of a long reign a sagacious King would acquire an experience of the highest affairs far longer, wider, and greater than any of his ministers. In form, the King is advised by his ministers; but in actual fact, the ministers are very often advised by the King. Ministers must derive much assistance from

✓ Jukes. "the Government
of the British Empire."

Having access in intimate confidence to the counsels of a personage in so exalted a position as the sovereign, who possesses, as he must, a kind of knowledge, and means of information different from, and superior to, their own; they are swayed, it is to be feared, by their personal and party interests, as well as those of the state; they may have had to make, in order to obtain support, bargains which tie their hands; they have ambitions for the future, which they are loath to jeopardize. Not so the King. He is permanent; he is above all parties; he does not bargain for place and honours; he has nothing in the way of ambition to satisfy, except the noble ambition of securing his country's welfare. Moreover, the King knows the mistakes that have been made by ministers' predecessors, and probably why they made them.

Then let us think of him in connexion with the people of the country; much of the power of the King is derived from popular sentiment, and it is all to the good that it should be influenced in a direction making for the stability of the nation rather than in a disruptive sense. The King supplies the personal and picturesque element which catches the population far more readily than constitutional arrangements, which cannot be heard or seen; and a King, or Queen, who knows how to play his part skilfully, by a display of tact, graciousness, and benevolence, is rendering priceless services to the cause of good government and contentment. The King attracts the admiration and interest of the great mass of his subjects in a way which no other political authority does; and he thus renders the government intelligible to the many. From this can be seen the value of the King in the mother country; let us now see his value in the whole Commonwealth.

The Value of the King in the Commonwealth

As a unifying force on the Empire the effect of the hereditary monarchy - let us again think of the King firstly as the hereditary monarch - is incalculable, and is such as could never be exerted by any other than a hereditary sovereign. No matter on what other principle the head of the state were appointed, he could

never represent more than one section of the English people - that is, the section adhering to the party which nominated him, or with which he was connected - and would certainly never represent the whole of the Empire. But the King represents the whole Empire as well as the Motherland. We have already seen that, especially in the case of the Dominions, the governments of the component parts of the Commonwealth have little or nothing to do with one another; in fact, in only a few cases has the British Government - styled though Parliament may be the Imperial Parliament - any control over the governments of the rest of the Commonwealth; and in very few - that is, in the case of crown colonies - has it a direct control.

If, then, there is no unification by a common, controlling government, what other ways of keeping the vast Commonwealth in cohesion are there? There may be the tie of race; but this can only exist between the Motherland and her colonies in the real sense of the word - that is, states where the whole, or the majority, of the population, belongs to some race as her own, but in our Empire we have blacks, brown men, yellow men, redskins, and indeed men of every possible colour - most of them hereditary enemies amongst themselves; many, living together, absolutely unconnected by descent, religion, or good-feeling; besides the whites of colonies we have conquered - for instance, the French of Canada - who have become loyal citizens of our Empire, even upholding it against the country of their descent.

What, then, is the link? The answer is - the King.

The King is King of every part of our Empire; he is not a far-away, dimly-understood name, such as would inevitably be the case with a president, or any other-elected head. He is the type of ruler that every single original race in our Empire - save the former Boer republics - had at the time when it was taken over; and even the Boers are monarchial by nature.

The natives, whose loyalty to us is unquestioned, have always had kings; their kings have probably always been subject to paramount kings. And they respect us and our Empire.

because we too have a King - a great King whom all love and obey - a ruler of territories such as their minds cannot grasp. They obey his officers because they are servants of him; and they are immensely proud to be considered servants of him too.

In Africa the natives will fight to the last breath against the ~~enemies~~ enemies of the Empire - but only because they are enemies of the King; they vie furiously with one another to do him service; they would die sooner than go against his wish.

And the same in India; before Queen Victoria was made Empress of India, the native soldiers fought loyally for the Raj, or government; but when they felt that they had a glorious Empress, whom they could understand and appreciate, and whose servants their officers were, they were prepared to fight a thousand times more loyally against her enemies; and moreover they were much more prepared to fight loyally side-by-side with their hereditary enemies when they felt that they were all subjects of the same Empress. And the same things occur all over the Commonwealth; very recently a Canadian Bishop brought loyal wishes to the King from a tribe of Red Indians, who wished him to thank him for the benefits brought to them by Queen Victoria. Differences of race, creed, and opinion are overcome by the feeling of comradeship engendered by loyalty and fealty to a common King. And that is the answer to the problem of the unity of the British Commonwealth.

✓ Alternatives to a King

Let us now discuss possible alternatives to the King, both as the Head of the State, and as a unifying bond between the Empire. A Head of the state most like a hereditary monarch in form is an elected monarch, such as ruled in the Holy Roman Empire; but the objection would be that which has been mentioned before - that is that he would represent only one faction of one country, Great Britain, and would have no call to the allegiance of the whole Commonwealth. The

same objection applies to a President as the head of our Empire, in a greater degree, since he would be, especially to the native population, a shadowy, indistinct figure, constantly changing - in distinction especially to the long reign of Queen Victoria, which had an extremely beneficial effect - and conveying nothing to them, since they are naturally monarchical in character. From these points of view, then, the King as he seems to be the only possible head of the state compatible with our Empire as it is now.

Secondly, let us think of an alternative form of link for the Empire. We have, under the present system - or lack of it - no Federal, or supreme, government; suppose, then, a Federal government be formed. It is obvious that, in an empire such as ours, formed, as it has been, gradually and in many different manners and forms, a Federal union would be much too rigid; that is to say, no allowance could be made in its constitution for out-of-the-ordinary happenings which are bound to come up in such a heterogeneous collection of states, colours, races, and creeds; and under the present constitution allowance can be, and is, made whenever necessary; but with a Federal union a certain predetermined ^{rule} has always to apply to a certain case regardless of its peculiar circumstances. It would seem, therefore, that, as has been said before, such a government would be so rigid as to collapse under the strain which would be placed upon it. And if we are not to leave this form of government, we must therefore keep to the present form, and we have seen that, under the present system, the King is the sole link.

Conclusion

From the foregoing arguments it seems that, whatever way one looks at the question - at home, or in the Empire; from a white or a native point of view; from the point of view of a dominion or a crown colony; whether one is a minister or a working-man;

whether one firmly upholds the present system of hereditary monarchy, or whether one would like to find a new system; taken any and every way, the King is the only force in the Commonwealth which can hold this vast territory together, and weld it into a solid force for co-operative action and the good of the world; which is what it should be, and will be, if we loyally support the King. That is the importance of the King in the Commonwealth.

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