

II. THE CORONATION.

The Conference met on the morrow of the Coronation of a new Sovereign. In the speeches at the opening plenary meeting of the Conference on the 14th May reference was made to the lasting character of the foundations of the British Commonwealth of Nations as laid down at the Imperial Conference of 1926, and the delegates declared their faith in the principles of liberty and co-operation under the Crown as the inspiration of the Commonwealth relationship and as the guiding principles of all their deliberations. There was general recognition of the significance of the Coronation ceremony, and it was noted that, as a result of communication between the Governments concerned, the forms of the Coronation service had been adapted to accord with the new constitutional relationships. Reference was made in particular to the significance of the changes in the Coronation oath, the first paragraph of which as taken by King George VI reads:—

“ Will you solemnly promise and swear to govern the peoples of Great Britain, Ireland, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the Union of South Africa, of your possessions and other territories to any of them belonging or pertaining, and of your Empire of India, according to their respective laws and customs? ”

The position may be summed up in the words of Mr. Mackenzie King—

“ . . . Continuity through change; progress through development of proved courses and innate tendencies; permanence and flexibility, are the distinctive mark of the political institutions which are our common heritage.

“ The great occasion which has given this week its colour and its imperishable place in our memories has appropriately illustrated this quality of British institutions. Those who participated in the Coronation of the King and Queen—and thanks to the inventions of the years that have passed since the last Coronation, it may truly be said that all the King’s peoples everywhere took part—must have been impressed by the blending of tradition and adaptability to new needs and new occasions which characterized that impressive service. It was marked by the continuing use of ritual and words and symbols which were ancient when the New World lands represented here were undiscovered and unknown, but it was marked also by the recognition of new political facts and constitutional relationships brought into being by the change and growth of the past generation and recorded in the Imperial Conferences of recent years.

“ Particularly significant was the new form of the oath by which the King solemnly declared the sense in which he has accepted the Crown. For the first time South Africa, New Zealand, Australia, Canada are expressly named. His Majesty thus records that sovereignty is to be exercised in the interest of the peoples of Canada, and the other countries set forth, according to their own laws and customs. For the first time in this great ceremony it was recognized that the relationship between the King and his people of Canada is direct and immediate. The oath has long embodied the principles upon which our system of democratic governance is built. It now recognizes that the relationships of the several peoples under the Crown, one with another, as well as with foreign states, have become interpenetrated by the ancient principles of freedom and the rule of law. Thus it may be said that the new oath, preserving the old and finding place for the new, embodies in simple fashion our political faith and mirrors the structure of this group of free, equal, and autonomous States known as the British Commonwealth of Nations.”

III. MESSAGE TO THEIR MAJESTIES THE KING AND QUEEN AND HIS MAJESTY’S REPLY.

At the first plenary meeting, and as the first official act of the Conference, a message of greeting to Their Majesties the King and Queen was moved by the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, seconded by the Prime Minister of the Union of South Africa, and passed unanimously by the Conference.

In moving the message Mr. Baldwin referred to the fact that it was the first occasion on which an Imperial Conference had met in a Royal Palace, and expressed the gratitude of the Conference to His Majesty for permitting the use of St. James’s Palace for the purpose.