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THE FISCAL AND DIPLOMATIC
FREEDOM OF THE BRITISH
OVERSEA DOMINIONS

BY
EDWARD PORRITT

EDITED BY
DAVID KINLEY
PRESIDENT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

OXFORD : AT THE CLARENDON PRESS
London, Edinburgh, New York, Toronto, Melbourne and Bombay
HUMPHREY MILFORD
1922

X:53.1-3^{IV}

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PRINTED IN ENGLAND
AT THE OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

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PREFACE

THIS book is ostensibly a story of fiscal progress, of trade and industry. Knowing this, the ordinary reader will feel impelled to turn from it as a dry record of facts and figures. But the book is more than that. It is a story of growth of nationalities, of adjustments of the economic and political life of her colonies to the mother country. It is a story of the growth to mature womanhood and independence of the greatest of the colonial daughters of the mighty Empire of Britain. It is a story of her independent action, of the ebb and flow of her affection, of the alternate strengthening and weakening of the bonds that join her to her mother land, yet on the whole always resulting in the strengthening of the more deeply laid and hidden ties that bind that wonderful world empire which has played so great a part in the war.

The fiscal history of Canada resembles in some respects that of the United States. Discussion of tariff and protection has played a large part. Many of the great movements, like the protectionist, sprang from the sordid motives of individuals; yet not infrequently, as in our own country, they worked out for the public weal. There is no minimizing of the blindness, the selfishness, and the sordidness of the views of many British statesmen. Not only to the average Englishman, but to many Englishmen above the average, charged with responsibilities of great colonial government, the colonies have frequently seemed matters of minor importance and the colonist entitled to something less than the full consideration of stay-at-home Englishmen. This point of view is well and frequently shown in the history of the great commonwealth to the north of us. However, the colonies, including Canada, were [not themselves altogether

free from blame. They have at times shown a desire to retain the advantages of the British imperial connexion and at the same time to have independence in fiscal and other matters. Such a spirit and point of view are not uncommon in national as well as individual affairs.

The belief was common in Canada as well as in England for many years that independence was the inevitable outcome for the colonies, and that, therefore, there was little need for giving attention to their relations to the mother country in the meantime. Now the colonies want both home rule and British citizenship. It is the task of British statesmen to find a way to grant their wishes. For certain it is that the world will be worse off if some arrangement is not devised to preserve the unity of that great spiritual commonwealth, the British Empire, whose members by their attitude and action in the late great war showed that spiritual bonds are more powerful after all to bring men together in the accomplishment of a common duty and the maintenance of common standards and ideals, than are the acts of lawgivers, the practices of politicians, the wiles of diplomats, or the theories of statesmen.

In tracing the history of the relations of Canada to the mother country, Mr. Pomeroy brings out very clearly the change of attitude of Great Britain towards the colonies after the American Revolution. The loss of the American colonies undoubtedly went far to produce in the minds of Englishmen the belief that ultimately all the colonies would separate themselves from the mother country and, therefore, to cultivate the indifference which at that time and at many later times the mother country showed towards her children.

Early in the nineteenth century fiscal policies, both colonial and British, so crossed one another that they both made for economic independence for the colonies. The protectionist

movement, which began early in Canada, led in this direction. The development of industries and the establishment of a national domestic policy stimulated the demand for responsible government, and this again led the Canadians to feel more and more that they could stand on their own feet. In the home country the feeling manifested towards Canada was indifference. The main interest of the people at home in the colonies was to have them as markets. It was half a century before the idea that the colonies were mere commercial appendages of the mother land was abandoned. As they felt the colonial markets to be just as much theirs whether they kept the colonies or not, the people at home became indifferent as to their retention and lost interest in maintaining those less tangible spiritual connexions which, after all, are the lasting binding cords between the colonies and the home country. There was through a generation or more on the part of Great Britain a strange blindness and indifference to a proper sense of obligation to her fellow countrymen who were colonists.

Meanwhile the great commonwealth of Canada has been developing into a really independent country. Yet when the World War broke out, all differences of fiscal policy, diplomatic quibbles, and estrangement over minor matters were swept away by the feeling of common brotherhood among members of the Empire, whether they were in the British Isles, in Canada, in Australia, or in the islands of the sea. The conduct of the colonies showed beyond question that it is the spiritual bond that the commonwealth of Great Britain must rely on for continuance. Mr. Perritt's history reveals this idea in manifold ways.

DAVID KINLEY.

CERRANA, ILLINOIS,
July 12, 1921.

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