

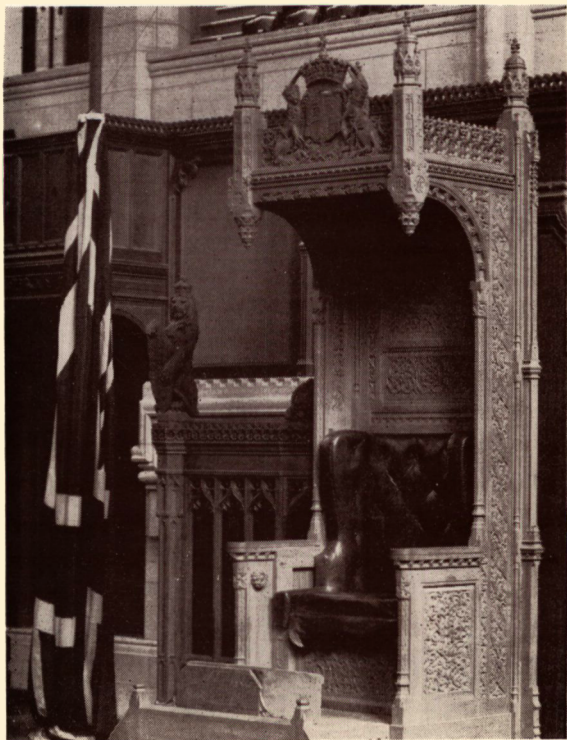
# The Birth of the Empire

*By*

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*and*

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SPEAKER'S CHAIR IN HOUSE OF COMMONS, OTTAWA



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## THE BIRTH OF THE EMPIRE

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The birth of an empire, as with the birth of an individual, must of necessity always be associated with pain, suffering and fear, though individually the fear is tempered by love of the child to come and of the father who gave it life. The birth of our Empire has been a long, tedious suffering by those who gave it birth. We all must realize that every citizen, whether man or woman who took part in the birth of the Empire, for good or evil, have built the British Empire.

England's origin is shrouded in mystery. As Thorney Island it first emerged into the known world as the home of a religious fraternity, men and women attracted there by the very isolation and forlornness of its situation.

Designated as a "terrible locality" by the old Saxon chroniclers, it was swampy, often almost entirely inundated by the Thames at flood tide, with unhealthy, noxious vapors. It must have been a veritable Slough of Despond, but its very wretchedness was its strength.

Eventually in the seventh century or thereabouts arose a group of monastic buildings, germ of a settlement that grew slowly until the reign of Canute, when a royal residence was built. Here, says tradition, Canute ordered the tide to retreat.

But it is to Canute's successor, Edward the Confessor, that the chief glory of creating the great centre of English life and tradition belongs. The young king, delicate, monkish by education and preference, was possessed of a holy fervor to build a noble Minster, sparing neither himself nor his court until the work was complete. The consecration of the Abbey cost him his life. Of what it was like we at the present time can have but little conception. The Painted Chamber, near the Monastery, of which remains are still to be seen, was a heritage which William the Conqueror acquired on his subjugation of Britain. The Conqueror realized the association of ideals and was crowned in the Abbey, made the palace one of his royal residences and held great councils there. But it is to his son and successor, Rufus the Red, that we owe the magnificence of Westminster Hall, which stands unparalleled in architectural beauty after the lapse of nine centuries.

The word "King" was derived from the German "konnen," meaning "to be able." The Tartar "Khan" may have been an earlier form of the word "King."

The buildings increased in size and beauty as Norman King succeeded Norman King, each sovereign having a hand in the work.

The Government, at first under the autocratic rule of the religious, changed to the autocracy of the King and finally to that of the three estates, clergy, nobles and judges, those who came to the King voluntarily to lay their complaints or requests at the foot of the throne, or by command to vote supplies to the sovereign.

In the earlier days the meeting of Parliament—or a "parley" of the communes—was held in Oxford, Lincoln or York to meet the convenience, or whim, of the ruler of the time, but to Westminster must be given the undoubted distinction of witnessing the dawn of the English constitution; unwritten then, unwritten now.

Previous to the Coronation of Charles II, the ceremonies of creating Knights of the Bath—those so selected were conducted to a chamber where a bath was prepared in which they bathed. The candidate then oiled

—went to church or chapel about daybreak, retired to bed—in the morning robed, habited in costly robes, took horse, received sword and spurs and was dubbed Knight by the King.

Members in the beginning were ordered to present themselves to the King and to do his bidding. Later men paid for the honour, in many instances to the patron or most influential man in the borough or constituency, frequently never even visiting the borough. One member wrote, "Men buy their seats and sell their votes."

The earliest Parliament met in the great hall, the nobles and clergy on one side, the citizens and burgesses on the other, with raised seats for the princes, the bishops, and even then woolsacks for the judges. The woolsack is traditionally held to have been placed in the House in the reign of Edward III, when wool was the staple industry of the country. It is now stuffed with hair.

Strange as it may seem to modern eyes, women up to the reign of Elizabeth played an important part in deliberative assemblies; abbesses and ladies of high birth joining in the debates.

Travel in the early days was both difficult and dangerous because of poor roads,

inadequate transportation and highwaymen, and there was no dignity to the position of member of the assembly. It often even excited pity rather than envy. In the middle of the twelfth century the recompense was twelve shillings per sitting day, not always paid. One member was given in payment "a firkin of saylte fyshe."

Petitions were often presented to correct individual rather than public wrongs. In the reign of Edward I five hundred petitions were presented, of which five only were of public concern.

The essence of Parliament was the "parley" between the crown and the "communes." While to Edward the Confessor, William and Rufus and finally Simon de Montfort great credit is due, yet the House of Commons was not created by them; rather it has been a result of evolutionary growth, slow, many times obscure, yet a steady growth proceeding from the fourteenth century.

"A Commune," wrote a horrified monk of St. Swithin's when John had granted common self-government to London, "swells the people's heads, terrifies royalty and puts the clergy in a stew."

While Latin or Norman-French was originally used almost exclusively after the Conquest, yet following the expulsion of the foreigners Simon de Montfort began the realization of his dream: English for England. When one considers the root branches of the original British stock, it is not surprising that England has made and sustained such an outstanding place in the World's history.

As time went on the meetings of the Communes, or Commons as it became Anglicized, was presided over by a chairman called the procurator, with no authority save to act as a mouthpiece, but gradually a change came, the procurator preserved order, saw that wishes of the majority were carried out and as now, enforced the rules and regulations.

The procurator became known as the Speaker—the voice of the Commons. The Speaker cannot make laws, he is responsible to the House alone. He was created “first commoner of the realm” by act of the reign of William and Mary, and as such has precedence of all commoners.

One of the most thrilling moments that ever occurred in the British House was when Charles I made an armed raid on the Commons demanding the delivery of the five

members who had been accused of treason, by command of the King. Leaving his soldiers and followers in the lobby, Charles entered the Chamber, the members rose and bowed, while the King, not to be outdone in courtesy, took off his hat. As Charles walked up the floor the Speaker, Lenthall, left the chair to meet him.

“By your leave, Mr. Speaker, I must borrow your chair for a while,” was the King’s greeting. The King apologized for his visit, it was due entirely to his demand for the arrest of the five recalcitrant members by the sergeant-at-arms not having been acted upon. Demanding the name of those members but receiving no answer, the King turned to the Speaker. “Are any of those persons in the House? Do you see them?”

Speaker Lenthall’s reply is famous for all time: “May it please Your Majesty, I have neither eyes to see nor tongue to speak in this place save as the House is pleased to direct me.”

The time had passed when the King could direct the Speaker to override the Commons.

No English Speaker contests an election. He is returned by acclamation. At the expiry



The mace was originally a weapon of offence, made of iron, or steel, capable of breaking through the strongest armour. The earliest ceremonial maces were introduced into England in the reign of Richard I. The mace used in the English House of Commons was made in 1649.



of his term, which is seldom less than ten years, he is retired on four thousand pounds a year and knighted by his sovereign. During his term of office he is housed in handsome apartments, beautifully furnished and staffed with competent servants.

Up to the end of the eighteenth century the Speaker's dinners were given weekly, on Saturday or Sunday, and were always full dress affairs. The State dining-room in the Speaker's apartment in London accommodates forty, the small dining-room seats eighteen. The meals served are Spartan in their simplicity compared with those of the middle of the eighteenth century when from twenty-five to thirty courses were served of the richest foods. Today a modest menu of from four to six light courses, beautifully cooked and served with proper wines, is more than ample for the heartiest appetite.

When I hear people speak of the "Good old days" I wonder whether they have ever read of some of the scandalous scenes that have taken place in the Mother of Parliaments. Probably that august House was never more shocked than a few years ago, when an Honourable Member entered the Chamber dreadfully intoxicated, and, before it was possible to stop him, stood in front of

the Speaker, demanding that august personage to sing a comic song.

The Speaker, on recovering from his horror, ordered the member to apologize. Instead, the culprit repeated his demand, the sergeant-at-arms took the member out of the House by force and locked him up in the Tower. The following day the member made profuse apologies, was heavily fined and resumed his seat a poorer and—we will hope—a wiser man.

I witnessed a brawl between two members in the House in London during wartime, when the Speaker ordered the Sergeant-at-arms to remove the men from the House. I have also been in the gallery in Ottawa on two different occasions when members attempted to cross the floor of the House in order to “fight it out” and thus satisfy their anger, but both were quickly brought to order when the Speaker threatened to “name” them, a proceeding which if carried out would expel the member so “named” from the floor of the House for a time decided by the majority.

In England the House consists of six hundred and seventy members with seating accommodation for about half that number. Forty members must be present to constitute a quorum, in Canada twenty members.

In the British House the members' seats are long wooden benches upholstered in green leather, with no desks. Members there are not allowed to read while in the House. In Canada in a House of six hundred, the members have desks, easy chairs, are allowed to read or write.

In this country when a member is speaking the event is usually spoken of as "Mr. So-and-so is on his feet" or "Mr. So-and-so is speaking." In England it is "Mr. So-and-so is on his legs." In England visitors in the gallery are spoken of as "Listeners," in this country as "visitors."

It is to the credit of the long line of English Speakers that only one was ever removed for a cause; he was convicted of taking a bribe.

The Chair was occupied by Onslow, a great Speaker, for thirty-five years.

The Speaker in the Canadian House frequently receives letters, signed or anonymous, suggesting that he carry on the business of the House in certain ways. Several years ago he received a letter from an entire stranger complaining that the members talked among themselves, were poorly behaved, rattled papers and in fact were so noisy that visitors in the gallery were unable to hear what was being said. The letter was

addressed to the Hon. W. A. Black (M.P. for Halifax). The Speaker, Hon. George Black (M.P. for Yukon), forwarded the letter to the Hon. W. A. Black saying, "This letter seems to have been sent to us jointly, but as it concerns your conduct and not mine I thought you should have it." Mr. Black of Halifax saw the joke.

Much comment was made when the Speaker instructed the guards that visitors to the gallery must not knit. The Speaker is merely the mouthpiece of the House. For some time members on both sides of the House had complained of the knitting and sewing done by visitors, saying "that what was allowable in wartime was not necessary at present."

The story is told that the small grandson of Gladstone asked his grandfather why the Speaker always said prayers in the House, and that Gladstone replied, "My boy, the Speaker first looks at the Members and then prays for the people."

In the Canadian House, by the way, the prayers are read by the Speaker in English and French on alternate days. In England the chaplain reads the prayers, the Speaker then takes the chair, the chaplain bows himself down to the floor of the House and retires.

Queen Elizabeth I at one time, impatient that legislation was not being hastened, asked, "Now, Mr. Speaker, what has passed in the lower House?" To which, with a low obeisance, he replied, "May it please Your Majesty, seven weeks."

A chairman of committee of the House, who shall also be the deputy Speaker, is elected at the beginning of every new House by the majority of the members. The Member elected as deputy Speaker shall have a full and practical knowledge of the language which is not that of the Speaker for the time being. If a French Speaker is occupying the chair, his deputy shall be an English-speaking member, and vice versa.

The clerk of the House, appointed by the crown for life at the recommendation of the government in power, occupies the position of a deputy minister. He is technically the keeper of the rolls, or records, of the House, though at the present time he keeps merely the minutes of those who are speaking at what time and how long, noting also the mover and seconder of each question. He must be a man thoroughly conversant with parliamentary rules and able to properly advise the Speaker, the Government, or Members who present petitions or ask questions. In Canada the clerk is also responsible

for the clerical force of the House, orders the distribution of reports and has other multifarious duties.

Undoubtedly the most outstanding clerk of the House in Canada in his time was Sir John Bourinot, whose work on "Parliamentary Procedure" is used almost as freely as May's, the latter being the leading authority. A recent clerk, Arthur Beauchesne, now retired, will probably have a similar distinction, as his "Parliamentary Rules and Forms" may be said to be the familiar textbook of the Members.

In early days English records were first inscribed by monkish clerks, the first semi-official records being kept by one Cobert, and called Rolls, but the Hansard records of the present time received the name from the publisher who first undertook recording and publication of the minutes of the House as a private enterprise.

Frequently printers' errors appeared, as when a Member said, "The resident magistrates could no more state a case than they could write a Greek ode" was reported as having said "The magistrates could no more state a case than ride a Greek goat." "The people rent the air with ten thousand shouts" was reported as "The people rent the air

with ten thousand snouts." Disraeli once quoted Tennyson: "Better fifty years of Europe than a cycle of Cathay," while he was reported the following day as having said, "Better fifty years of true love than a circus in Bombay." "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!" once exclaimed Sir William Harcourt, in the course of an onslaught on Mr. Chamberlain. A reporter improved it by saying, "Great Dinah, what a farce this is!"

In Westminster, as here in Canada, Members are frequently interrupted when speaking. Burke, when suffering at one time from continuous interruptions and cat-calling, said, "I could teach a pack of hounds to yelp with more melody and equal comprehension."

The Sergeant-at-arms is a picturesque figure. Usually an army officer, he holds the position indefinitely, for ten years at least, unless discharged for a cause. His is the duty of preserving order at the behest of the Speaker if members are not behaving with propriety. He also attends to looking after the servants of the House and as well the protective staff. Nominally this work is entirely his own, but really he acts in consultation with the Speaker. While his duties are somewhat onerous, the Sergeant-at-

arms really acts as a buffer between the Speaker, the members and the general staff.

The Sergeant-at-arms when in the chamber wears knee breeches, long black silk stockings, patent leather pumps with cut steel buckles, cutaway braided coat and a side sword. He precedes the Speaker into the House carrying the Mace over his right shoulder. The Mace when on the table shows that the Speaker is in the chair, when it is on the rack at the end of the clerk's table, the House is in committee.

The present Mace in Ottawa is like that used in the English House of Commons and was presented to replace an old mace destroyed in the fire that years ago completely destroyed Parliament Buildings. Those buildings were veritable firetraps, lined throughout with beautifully carved white pine, stained and varnished. The present chair used by the Speaker is a replica of the Speaker's chair in the House of Commons at Westminster and was presented to the House of Commons by the United Kingdom Branch of the Empire Parliamentary Association. The present House of Commons is practically fireproof, built of cement and stone.

In England the Sergeant-at-arms was at first a strong man who accompanied the



Speaker to protect him from the rowdies and hoodlums that frequently followed the Speaker and his entourage. The Mace was then a long staff topped by a large round knob studded with sharp spikes.

There have been various names given the many sittings of the House at Westminster :

There was the 'Thieves' Parliament, when Simon de Montfort complained to the King that he robbed his subjects to enrich strangers. The Parliament de la Bond, when the members came armed against the Spencers, wearing different coloured bands. The Good Parliament, when the members directed all their energies to the rescue of fallen women. The Merciless Parliament, when no mercy was shown to those who violated the law in the slightest degree. The Shortest Parliament, which sat for but one day. The Unlearned Parliament, that made laws mistakenly, or incorrectly, not having a single lawyer among the members. The Parliament of Bats, when the members received orders from the King not to wear their swords, so they came armed with staves. The Long Parliament, which sat from time to time for thirty-five years without dissolution. The Praise God Barebones Parliament in the time of Cromwell—named for a fanatical follower of the Protector. It was the Pro-

tector who pointed to the Mace and said "Take away that bauble," thus having the authority of the House done away with, and finally the Drunken Parliament, when the Speaker and many of the members were too much under the influence of wine to preside.

The Prime Ministers have not always had the smoothest of paths in their dealings with their sovereigns.

Queen Victoria, before her marriage, desired to have Prince Albert made King Consort, was most insistent in fact, until Lord Melbourne, who was then Prime Minister, said, "For God's sake let us hear no more of it, ma'am; if you once get the English people into the habit of making kings they may begin to unmake them." It was only four years before Prince Albert's death that he was made Prince Consort by the unanimous consent of both Houses.

No more eloquent testimonial to the character of the British peoples, to the revolutionary evolution of their government, could be paid than the following: "Imperial Rome sacrificed her provinces rather than nurse them into daughter states, the British Empire has saved its unity by multiplying its representative systems and the Mother of Parliaments not only made the English state

but reproduced it in every quarter of the globe.”

Thorney Island, not knowing nor understanding what she was doing when she gave birth to the Empire, has with the help of all peoples from every part of the globe created the British Empire. At this season of the year, when all nations are celebrating the gift of our Saviour, it is up to us, individually and collectively, to do honour to Him by obeying both the laws of God and of man, in this manner making the Empire the leader in world affairs and in all that is good, so that we may truly say to all peoples, “Peace on earth, goodwill toward men.”

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No rocky pile must be deemed too forbidding, for oft-times, sheltered by the sun-kissed side of some giant's footstool, will be found our first spring flower, locally called Purple Crocus, but in reality the dainty pasque flower (*Anemone Nuttalliana*) so commonly found in May in the valleys of the Canadian Rockies near Banff. The flowers are like the ordinary garden crocus in appearance, save that they are protected from inclement weather by a soft hairy down. The peculiarity of this member of the crowfoot family (*Ranunculaceae*) is the growth of the foliage after the flower has blossomed. As the purple sepals fade and fall the seeds form, and then the head presents a beautiful plumose appearance, for to each seed is attached a long, silky tail, the whole forming a pretty feathery tuft.



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PASQUE FLOWER  
(*Anemone Nuttalliana*)

Chosen by the Yukon Council as the  
Territorial Flower.