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Canada and the transition to Commonwealth

BRITISH–CANADIAN RELATIONS
1917–1926

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For Alison
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ABBREVIATIONS

State papers

The various classes of British state papers referred to in the footnotes are listed in the Bibliography, section 1. Canadian state papers cited are of the Department of External Affairs.

Parliamentary debates

GB, HoC Debates of the British House of Commons, with date
Canada, HoC Debates of the Canadian House of Commons, with date

Parliamentary papers

These are referred to in the footnotes by their Command number only. Full reference will be found in the Bibliography, section iv.

Journals and documents often cited

CHR Canadian Historical Review
DCER Documents on Canadian External Relations
JCPS Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies
JICH Journal of Commonwealth and Imperial History
PREFACE

In 1976 we are witnessing the elaborate celebrations marking the bicentenary of the Declaration of Independence, the point at which two hundred years ago thirteen of Britain’s American colonies began their revolution and broke away from the first British empire. Less acknowledged will be the fiftieth anniversary of another such declaration, one whose language was avowedly not revolutionary but which in its own way effectively proclaimed the independence of Britain’s self-governing colonies from what was briefly known as the third British empire. The Balfour Declaration of 1926 was an agreed manifesto, setting out the equality of Britain and the dominions and their individual autonomy within the commonwealth association. It attempted in this way to measure and define their post-war relationship to each other, to incorporate into appropriate constitutional terms the far-reaching developments that had been taking place, piecemeal and de facto, over the previous decade. No revolutionary wars were needed to make good the claims advanced here for the dominions, because by 1926 (with the possible exception of the Irish Free State) they were generally satisfied that their status was both adequate and secure. The Balfour Declaration thus represented as much a retrospective analysis as a prescription for future change, and it is with these ten years or so which lead up to this moment of definition that this study will be concerned.

The work has grown out of a dissertation submitted to Cambridge University, and in its preparation I have incurred many debts of gratitude to individuals and to institutions. Professor Nicholas Mansergh of St John’s College, Cambridge, gave me persistent encouragement over a number of years, and to him above all I owe thanks. Norman Hillmer of the Directorate of History in Ottawa has read many sections of the work and been most generous with his time and advice. Ian Nish at the London School of Economics was good enough, when extremely busy with other business, to offer very helpful comments on chapter 4. Brian Tennyson of St Francis Xavier University, engaged in similar research, kindly aided
Preface

me with some details of the 1926 Imperial Conference. For their unfailing assistance I am much indebted to the staffs of the Public Record Office in London and the Public Archives of Canada in Ottawa.

For permission to study and to quote from private collections of papers I owe thanks to a number of people. Professor Craig Brown kindly gave me access to the diaries of Sir Robert Borden. Professor A. J. P. Taylor offered anecdotes and advice in introducing me to the Lloyd George papers, Mr John Grigg provided lunch and tea when opening to me the papers of his father. Mr Donald Simpson supplied a most helpful introduction to the letters of E. J. Harding. I must thank the Trustees of the British Museum for permission to quote from a letter in the Balfour papers, and the authorities of the Bodleian Library, Oxford, for permission to use the papers of Lord Milner.

The editors of the Commonwealth series at Cambridge University Press deserve a word of thanks for their patience, as do Susan Haggis and Ann Watt for helping to prepare the final typescript. My wife’s relief at the completion of this work must not preclude a particular and final word of thanks to her.

Part of the material in chapter 6 was first published as an article, ‘Whitehall and the 1923 Imperial Conference’, in Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History, 1, no 2 (1972–3).