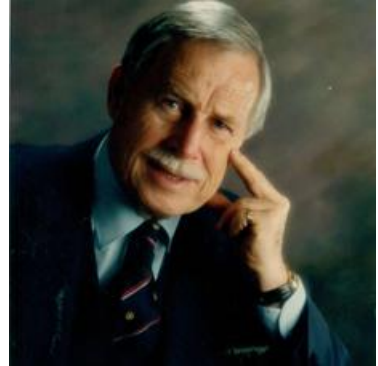


The Royal Metaphor – A Servant

By Col. The Honourable Judge. J. R. Matheson, O.C., K.St.J., C.D., Q.C, U.E., LL.D

Is it not remarkable that Canada has emerged through the turbulence of the last quarter century continuing to be a constitutional monarchy?

The British North America Act was passed by Westminster during the great era of empire. To our Fathers of Confederation monarchy appeared as the respectable norm, a perfectly natural and proven political arrangement. But the Victorian era with its glitter and pageantry ended in January, 1901. The halcyon days of empire are now scarcely remembered. Looking at the disappearance and demise of hereditary rulers since World War I renders it the more astonishing that this democracy in the Americas survives as a kingdom.



This is all the more remarkable when we note that it is following major constitutional change and after the canvassing of all options. The Canada Act 1982 represents the consensus concerning what appeared best for this nation's future. No other consideration was involved.

In their bones really all Canadians are patriots. Many of us live out a sort of love affair with the land -this stark stretch of trees and tundra and lakes, of mountains and seacoasts and plains. At a distance from home the very thought of Canada fairly takes one's breath away. The great cities now provide the range, variety and vitality of the whole family of man. Even in crowded centres we discover compassionate and caring community.

I learned something about the character of Canadians during the war. In the spring of 1940 I was given a troop of 150 volunteers fresh out of Dorchester Penitentiary. Rough cut and unruly they were to be sure but in a few months a trustworthy band of heroes. Now, after a lifetime in the courts where one meets all sorts and conditions of men, I affirm that "the Canadian" is generally a very decent sort of person. Why is the Canadian recognized throughout the world as kindly, tolerant and even generous? For, indeed, that appears to be his reputation.

May I offer the thought that Canada is composed historically of a wide assortment of "losers" who have nevertheless had the tenacity to endure. Through ancestral genes, or personally, we have experienced suffering. The Inuit, the native Indian of whatever band, the French - Acadian or Quebecois, the Loyalist, the emigre from Europe, Asia or elsewhere, all have known some form of deprivation of defeat. Whether from Hungary, or the Hebrides or Vietnam nearly all immigrants to Canada came here seeking refuge rather than reward. Few came for a holiday.

In this cold but caring land the new Canadian was invited to lay down his most precious gifts upon the altar of country whether he was German or Jew or of whatever hue of skin. And now by free choice we continue to have as head of state a monarch descended from the Saxon Egbert of Wessex who united England in 829 A.D. Is June, 1984 this not truly extraordinary?

This bilingual and multicultural country proclaims afresh the doctrine of equality in a Charter of Rights guaranteeing dignity to each individual person. Ours is a society committed to security for all with easy access to the courts for injury or insult. We have sought sincerely to establish a just society wheresoever the Queen's writ shall run, a compassionate society in which none of Canada's children shall go under. It is our common resolve that there shall be "no unimportant tears".

The Loyalist, whether Palatine, Black, Dutch or Scots came to this land, which was then largely French, because he was defeated. By coming, in such numbers, he guaranteed the continuation of parliamentary institutions and the monarchy. Paradoxically by his coming he guaranteed "the French fact". Had he not come French Canada would most certainly have been overrun by an ambitious, intolerant and acquisitive new republic. It is noteworthy that the Prime Minister of Canada who authored the Canada Act with its momentous constitutional implications was the devoted son of the late Grace Elliott, U.E.

Lanark County, where I am privileged to live and work, was once the Military District of Bathurst, a community settled by the soldiers discharged after the victory of Waterloo. These combat veterans were calculated to provide reliable fighting backup should the Loyalist settlements from Glengarry to the Bay of Quinte ever be overrun. Lord Wellington offered full support to the great enterprise of Colonel By who after the experience of 1812-13 linked Kingston to Montreal by an alternate water route. A century and a half ago the absolute necessity of Canadians sticking together for their survival was fully appreciated and understood.

Why have we, who would build a brave new world, chosen to remain a monarchy? We are living on the edge of the twenty-first century. In our lifetime we have witnessed the collapse of many royal houses and hereditary rulers. In our institutions of higher learning we find some advocates of the republican way of life. Why is the Crown not a thing of the past?

The answer is, I believe, to be found in a tiny person - our Queen. Her father and her mother had endeared themselves to the world for their valour in arduous times and are remembered for their steadfast devotion to duty. Her Majesty Elizabeth II, commenced her reign on February 7, 1952 at the tender age of twenty-five. Many of us still remember her while hardly more than a girl in the wartime uniform of the Auxiliary Territorial Service serving in a motor transport unit.

Her coronation in 1953 was seen as a most solemn act of self commitment as servant to her peoples. She has discharged this great trust in a manner unexcelled in modern memory. Modestly, and without rhetoric or pretension she has responded to every request however demanding or dangerous. While other leaders worthy or notorious have arrived on the world scene and then disappeared, some by violence, she has carried on with quiet dignity. With ship, rail, car and jet aircraft she has made herself accessible to more subjects than have all of her royal ancestors combined. Television has made her known to mankind.

What is more important is her superb sensitivity to all the constitutional proprieties. She has been faithful to the dictates of the several systems of laws and as well the wishes of her principal elected advisors. Recently a little school girl in Montague told me "we should be obeying her! She is the Queen. Why should she be doing what we want all the time?" I tried to explain to her that that is the reason there is still a Queen of Canada.

I recall the moving tribute paid in the Commons by the late Réal Caoutte who, acknowledging that he knew very little about royalty, declared that he had no difficulty whatsoever in recognizing a great and a good woman.

Our Queen has proved to her large and diverse household that 'freedom wears a crown'. Her Majesty is the most compelling reason that the monarchy survives and flourishes in North America. Of course we do not possess the Queen-she belongs to a world that increasingly interacts as a single living cell.

Nevertheless, though she belongs to many, permit us to say and pray, 'God save our gracious liege lady, Elizabeth, our noble and truly beloved Queen of Canada!'