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The Declaration by His Majesty's Government on Constitutional Reform: The Precedents.

THE interpretation of the Declaration by His Majesty's Government on the reform of the Ceylon Constitution¹ is a matter for the Secretary of State and the Board of Ministers. It may be useful, however to draw the precedents from other parts of the British Commonwealth. Indeed the very language of the Declaration suggests that those who drafted it had those precedents in mind.

The substance of the Declaration is an undertaking that the post-war examination of the reform of the constitution will be directed towards the grant of "full responsible government under the Crown in all matters of internal civil administration." The limitation to *internal civil administration* is explained by the fact that His Majesty's Government will retain control of matters relating to defence and external affairs. On these matters the Governor will have independent legislative powers; and he will also be instructed to reserve for His Majesty's Government any Bills dealing with these matters enacted by the Ceylon legislature. He will also have power to reserve Bills which—

- " (a) relate to the Royal Prerogative, the rights and property of His Majesty's subjects not residing in the Island, and the trade and shipping of any part of the Commonwealth :
- (b) have evoked serious opposition by any racial or religious community and in the Governor's opinion are likely to involve oppression or unfairness to any community :
- (c) relate to currency."

II.

The idea of responsible government was a nineteenth century development. The American colonies knew about representative government, but they knew nothing about responsible government. There was no complaint in the Declaration of Independence that "the present King of Great Britain" had refused responsible government: there was nothing about responsible government in the appeal of the General Congress to the Canadians in 1774. Yet it may almost be said that the American colonies created responsible government, for the American Revolution destroyed "government by prerogative" in Great Britain and there was less difference between the British Constitution under Peel and under Pitt than that between the British Constitution under Pitt and under Lord North. The British Constitution changes imperceptibly, however:

1. S.P. XVII of 1943, p. 3