

THE QUEEN'S NEW EMPIRE

By GEORGE HAMBLETON

QUEEN Elizabeth is creating a new concept of empire; and, to quote her own words, it is of a type never seen before. The all-seeing eye of the movie camera gave us glimpses of it as she paused, on her Commonwealth tour, for a South Sea interlude at Fiji and Tonga. In Fiji, with the Duke of Edinburgh, she took lunch in a grass-roofed native house. On Tonga, seated on either side of Queen Salote, the royal pair joined in a feast of suckling pigs, chickens, yams and crayfish. And (alas for Victorian etiquette) they ate, native fashion, with their fingers.

Note the Queen's Christmas message from New Zealand. "The modern Commonwealth," she broadcast from Auckland—

"bears no resemblance to the empires of the past. It is an entirely new conception, built on the highest qualities of the spirit of man: friendship, loyalty and the desire for freedom and peace.

To that new conception of an equal partnership of nations and races, I give myself heart and soul, every day of my life."

Now compare that with the old concept of Empire as Kipling expressed it in his hackneyed lines of rather more than fifty years ago:

God of our fathers, known of old,
Lord of our far-flung battle line
Beneath whose awful hand we hold
Dominion over palm and pine.

"An equal partnership of nations *and races!*" A different concept, indeed a very different concept, from the old idea of the sahib and the coolie. One fraught with tremendous possibilities and, for all members of the Commonwealth, one presenting new and difficult problems.

Yet great as are the difficulties which face Elizabeth the Second, they are no greater than those which faced Elizabeth the First. For when the daughter of Henry the Eighth and Anne Boleyn—also at the age of twenty-five—ascended the Throne, the fortunes of England had sunk to almost the lowest ebb they had known. The state over which she was called to reign comprised, in addition to England, the principality of Wales, an Ireland over which, till the last year of her reign, her rule extended scarcely beyond the English Pale, the Isle of Man, the Scillies and the Channel Islands. Her half-sister Mary had lost Calais, sole remainder on the European continent of Angevin dominions which once stretched from the borders of Scotland to the Pyrenees. Over Scotland, Elizabeth could claim nothing

but a paper suzerainty which the Scots rejected. Humiliated by defeat, embittered by the memory of "heretics" whom Mary had sent to the stake, England was on the verge of rebellion.

But her difficulties were not greater than her opportunities. And she seized and exploited those opportunities with Tudor ruthlessness and Tudor determination. In a land which had come to distrust the foreigner, Elizabeth could claim a blood more English than that of any sovereign since Harold. No English sovereign was ever more insular in either character or policy. When urged by the Commons to marry, Elizabeth held up her hand with the coronation ring, declaring in cold rebuke that England was her husband, Englishmen her children. Nor could she deem herself barren nor her life unprofitable while employed in rearing and ruling such a family. As she rode through London on her coronation procession, there were those who remembered her father in his splendid youth, his athletic figure, his flashing eye, his golden hair.

Or, more picturesquely, from the *Chronicles of Holinshead*:

On her entering the citie of London she was received of the people with prayers, wishes, welcomings, cries and tender words, all of which argued a wonderful earnest love of most obedient subjects towards their sovereign. And, on the other side, her grace, by holding up her hands and merrie countenance to such as stood farre off, and most tender and gentle language to those that stood nigh unto her grace, did declare herselfe no less thankfullie to receive her people's good will than they lovinglie offered it to her.

And it was not only to those her subjects who were of noble birth that she showed herself thus verie gracious, but also to the poorer sort. How many nose-gaies did her grace receive at poore women's hands? How oftentimes staid she her chariot when she saw anie simple bodie offer to speake to her grace. Especiallie is it to be remembered how a branch of rosemarie given her grace with a supplication about Fleet-bridge was scene in her chariot till her grace came to Westminster not without the marvellous wondering of such as knew the presenter and noted the queene's most gracious receiving and keeping the same. Therefore may the poore and needie look for great hope at her grace's hands who hath shown so loving a carefulness for them.

To Elizabeth Tudor, England was her England, her royal throne of kings. What if Venice, with rolling Latin phrase and golden circlet cast into the waters, did espouse the everlasting sea? Had Elizabeth not her sea dogs ready to singe the Spanish king's beard for a song? Were there no young and valiant hearts in this England of hers ready to brave the tempestuous

seas? In very sooth there were. And Elizabeth wielded her royal power over the whole social and economic structure of the nation. She granted exclusive trading charters abroad, manufacturing monopolies at home. New wealth poured in. State-ly manor houses rose above the country side. Poets and dramatists lent new genius to the English tongue. Only a year after the Armada, Hakluyt, in the first edition of his *Voyages*, put the exultant interrogative: "Which of the Kings of this land before Her Majesty had their banners ever seen in the Caspian sea? Which of them hath ever dealt with the Emperor of Persia as Her Majesty hath done and obtained for her merchants large and loving privileges? Who ever saw, before this regiment, an English Ligier in the stately porch of the Grand Signor at Constantinople? Who ever found English consuls and agents at Tripoli, in Syria, at Aleppo, at Babylon, at Bakara and, what is more, who ever heard of Englishmen at Goa before now? What English ship did heretofore ever anchor in the mighty river of Plate? Pass and repass (in former opinion) the straight of Magellan, range alongside the coast of Chili, Peru and the backside of Nova Hispania, further than any Christian ever passed, traverse the mighty breadth of the South Sea, land upon the Luzones in despite of the enemy, enter into alliance, amity and traffic with the Princes of Moluccas and the isle of Java, double the famous cape of Nova Speranza, arrive at the isle of St. Helena and last of all return home richly laden with the commodities of China as the subjects of this now flourishing monarch have done?"

Thus, under Elizabeth the first, were laid the foundations of the greatest Empire the world had known.

But what of the new Empire, that great Commonwealth of which Elizabeth the Second is head today, that Commonwealth built "on the highest qualities of the spirit of man," the Commonwealth with its new conception of "an equal partnership of nations and races?"

Let us glance over it, noting changes in recent years.

In their striving for autonomy and equality of status, the self-governing units of the Commonwealth now look askance at the designation "dominion" they once sought so eagerly. "Realm" felt to be less limiting in sovereignty takes its place. Colony has disappeared. Ireland (with the exception of the six counties of Northern Ireland) and Burma are both independent republics. Ceylon and Pakistan, once part of the Indian Empire, have full representative government within the

Commonwealth. India itself is a sovereign democratic republic but accepts the Queen "as the symbol of the free association of its independent member nations and, as such, the Head of the Commonwealth." And with creation of India as a sovereign republic ends that glamorous title "Empress of India" which d'Israeli devised for Queen Victoria. For to India, Elizabeth the Second is neither queen nor empress. She is head of the Commonwealth.

The old dominions of Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa have advanced to new and greater destiny. Newfoundland is Canada's tenth province. Britain, at the heart of the Commonwealth, has lost in relative strength. During the long reign of Queen Victoria, Britain became the richest and most powerful country in the world. Two world wars drained her lifeblood. She sacrificed millions in overseas assets to pay for war supplies. She accumulated millions in external debts. Shipping losses, bomb damage at home, arrears of industrial maintenance and equipment damaged her national economy and delayed her recovery. Once proud Mistress of the Seas, Britain, as against the goliaths of the United States and the Soviet Union, is scarcely more than a second rate power. Four decades ago, she was the hub of a great colonial empire. Now, surging native nationalisms are tearing old colonial ideas to shreds.

One great gift Britain made to the world (and I think her greatest gift) namely the art of self-government. Parliamentary government is far from infallible. It has inherent weaknesses. Yet with all its faults and all its weaknesses, no system of government has been devised which better directs the affairs of a great state and at the same time preserves the rights of the individual. And the struggles among the peoples of the British Isles for individual rights, for freedom of speech and thought and faith, for the right to limit royal prerogatives in freely elected parliaments—all these have been reflected and are still reflected all through the colonies, dominions, realms—call them what we will—of the Queen's domain. Responsibility of the Government to the House of Commons—a cardinal principle of the British parliamentary system—is equally a basic principle in the parliaments of the Republic of India, the Republic of Ireland, in the national parliaments of Canada, Australia, the Union of South Africa and New Zealand. The American colonies adopted a different system. But the American system differs from the British in application rather than in principle.

In the United States, the Cabinet is appointed by an elective President and is responsible to the President. It is not responsible to Congress. But, in both cases, ultimate control lies with the people.

Generally speaking, the systems of government in the colonies and protectorates of the British Empire may be divided into five groups, the first group having made the greatest advance towards autonomy, namely (1) Colonies with an elected House of Assembly or House of Representatives and a nominated Legislative Council; (2) Those with a partly elected Legislative Council, the constitution of which does not provide for an official majority; (3) Those with a partly elected Legislative Council, the constitution of which provides for or would admit of an official majority; (4) Those with a nominated Legislative Council and (5) Those without a Legislative Council.

And all through the domains of the Queen, races, colors and religious faiths are in political evolution. In the old dominions, the autonomy process is complete. They have unhampered freedom to legislate as they will. In greater or less degree, colonies and protectorates are stirring uneasily in the shackles of an outworn colonialism. In the once dark continent of Africa, the advance is especially noteworthy. The two Rhodesias, North and South, and Nyasaland have linked in a federation based on the principle of partnership between the European and the African inhabitants. The total population is approximately 6,470,000 with roughly one-third in each territory. The white population forms only about three per cent of the total.

Legislative powers of the Federation are vested in a Federal Legislature which consists of the Queen (represented by a Governor General) and the Federal Assembly. The Federal Assembly consists of a Speaker and 35 members. Of these, 26 are elected, six are specially elected African members and two are specially appointed European members.

"The establishment of the new Federation does not add a new member to the Commonwealth," observes the monthly bulletin of the Ottawa Department of External Affairs, in its February issue. "Full self-government in the normal sense has not been granted to the new Federation, since its constitution provides some measure of control to the United Kingdom Government through the Queen's power of disallowance and the reserve powers of the Governor in respect of certain types of legislation. In the international field the status of the Federation will be similar to that which has obtained in the case of Southern

Rhodesia: the United Kingdom will retain general responsibility for the external relations of the Federation, but this will not preclude the Federal Government from dealing directly with neighbouring countries on matters of a local character, nor from entering on its own account into certain types of international agreements concerning trade and technical matters."

In British West Africa, where white slave-traders once made huge profits in black ivory, lives almost one-half of the total population of the British colonial empire. Little more than half a century ago, the primitive life of the tribe was all most Africans knew. Three of the four territories in British West Africa—the Gold Coast, Nigeria and Sierra Leone—have made notable advance towards self-government. In 1948, Nigeria and the Gold Coast opened their own university colleges where students can sit for London University degrees. The Nigeria college has its schools of agriculture, forestry and animal health. The Gold Coast college has a department of agriculture. In 1948-49, the Gold Coast college opened its doors to 90 students, two of whom were women. In 1951-52, there were 340 students. Of these, 161 took intermediate and preliminary courses, 144 took degree courses. Eleven of the students were women.

The new constitution of the Sudan—the Self-Government Statute—provides for the setting up of an elective bicameral Sudanese Parliament and of a Sudanese executive responsible to it. The Governor-General has special but limited powers. And the Self-Government Statute also lays down the fundamental rights of freedom of person, speech, association and religion and proclaims the rule of law together with the independence of the Judiciary.

In this somewhat cursory survey, I have attempted to show how a great Commonwealth and Empire evolved from plantations and colonies and far-flung arteries of trade. We have seen how, from meager beginnings beyond the seas, great nations grew, rivalling and surpassing in power and opulence the mother-country herself. Yet however glittering and romantic the past, it is to the future we must look.

In memorable and oft-quoted words, the Imperial Conference of 1926 defined the position and relationship of the Britain and the Dominions as "autonomous communities within the British Empire, equal in status, in no way subordinate one to another in any aspect of their domestic or external affairs."

But the Conference did more than define status. In words less well known and rarely quoted, the conference report continued:

But no account, however accurate, of the negative re-

lations in which Great Britain and the Dominions stand to each other can do more than express a portion of the truth. The British Empire is not founded upon negotiations. It depends essentially, if not formally, on positive ideals. Free institutions are its life-blood. Free cooperation is its instrument. Peace, security and progress are among its objects. Aspects of all these great themes have been discussed at the present conference; excellent results have been thereby obtained. And though every Dominion is now, and must always remain, the sole judge of the nature and extent of its cooperation, no common cause will, in our opinion, be thereby imperilled.

These words are not merely a statement of positive ideals. After more than a quarter of a century, they are still a challenge to action. The fault in Commonwealth relations in the past is this: Britain and the Dominions met the supreme test of two wars fighting side by side. But once the victory was won, they retired to their tents and failed to press positive policies in time of peace. It was a particular weakness of Canadian delegations to the old Imperial Conferences between the two world wars. They argued, and properly urged, for the removal of all restrictions on the right of the Dominions to govern themselves. But, influenced by isolationist policies in the United States and by isolationist opinion back home, they permitted fears of Downing Street rule to color their whole attitude and habits of thought. Fear of commitment was their evil spirit; dread of entanglement, their obsession.

Our task now is to strengthen the Commonwealth. We must make of it a real, a vital force in world affairs, exercising all the pressure it can exercise for peace, security and progress. There is no need to sacrifice hard-won autonomies. There is no need to create some omniscient super-state operating in the rarefied atmosphere of Whitehall. But, faced with the urgent problems of today, Commonwealth units must do more than exchange pleasantries. In the Colombo plan and in other directions they have, since the second world war, embarked on unprecedented schemes of cooperation. They can do more. Cooperation in the economic field alone is not enough. Cooperation should be carried into the higher fields of international affairs.

Queen Elizabeth's conception of a Commonwealth based on equal partnership of nations and races will not be realized easily. There will be many rivers to cross, many mountains to climb. It can be realized if all Commonwealth units are prepared to cooperate to the full.