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WHAT MAKES THE COLONEL TICK?

REFERENCES in the New Zealand House of Representatives the other day to the Chicago "Tribune" and its anti-British attitude, and the fact that that paper recently celebrated its 100th birthday, prompt us to publish this "profile" of Colonel McCormick, the publisher of the paper and the man who moulds its character so directly that it is an almost exact reflection of his own. The article is taken from the London "Observer"

IN the streets of Chicago the crowds cheered and a few individualists booed; Lake Michigan was lit by a firework reproduction of Hiroshima and two life-size Niagara Fallses, and at half-second intervals bombs were exploded.

But to the lonely figure on the 34th floor of the Tribune Tower no sound penetrated the air-conditioned room with thick walnut panelling, rubber-sprung floor and trick-locked double door. Accompanied only by his German police dog, Colonel Robert Rutherford McCormick watched the 100th birthday celebrations of the Chicago Tribune in splendid insulation.

The Colonel—as he is known to all but the few intimates who call him Bertie—cannot claim to have directed the paper during the whole of its career, but members of his family have been with the paper for 95 years, and he has himself built it up over a quarter of a century into one of the two newspapers in the United States with a daily circulation of over a million. The other

—the New York Daily News—was created by his cousin, Joe Patterson.

The direction of the "Trib." has been the Colonel's and the Colonel's alone. He bought the Canadian forests from which the paper is made, he built the fleet which carries the paper across the Lakes, he planned the four-colour presses which print coloured cartoons on the front page, he bought the radio franchise for the most powerful station in Chicago, and he saw that his paper was the first to be published in the wake of American troops on Luzon and in Tokio.

They Earn Their Money

None of his subordinates would deny that McCormick was the prime mover in everything the paper did, but all would claim that they earned their princely salaries in giving substance to the casual ideas that are thrust at them. The Tribune is the Colonel's oyster; he provides the grit of ideas and the staff produce the pearls. A sudden idea that the world is becoming over-populated leads to a note to the newsroom: "How much would we add to the known area of the world if the ocean bottoms were made into land? RRMc"; the restless cawing of rooks outside the McCormick mansion results in the farm column being devoted to plans for improving shotguns; a suggestion to the editorial writers that New Zealand would be safer in the United States culminates in a campaign to make all the British Dominions states of the Union.

In this well-oiled machine the gap between idea and execution has been so narrowed that, not unnaturally, a certain confusion exists in McCormick's mind between the two. By a sort of neo-Cartesianism he reasons: "I think; therefore it is." A remarkable example of this form of induction was given in 1942, when the Colonel replied personally to a letter questioning his patriotism. He dumbfounded his critic by replying:

You do not know it, but the fact is that I introduced the R.O.T.C. into the schools; that I introduced machine guns into the Army; that I introduced mechanisation; I introduced automatic rifles; I was the first ground officer to go up in the air and observe artillery fire. Now I have succeeded in making that the regular practice in the Army. . . .

Reds Under the Beds

In Britain, McCormick is best known as a violent Anglophobe, but to Americans this is only one phobia amongst the many which are magnified into policy by his newspaper. For the Colonel, uncharitableness begins at home. Though he supported Roosevelt in 1932, McCormick reversed his stand overnight when the New Deal called for a 40-hour week for newspaper employees. This "threat to the freedom of the Press" at once produced a violent persecution complex in the Tribune's publisher, and from 1933 onwards—as President Roosevelt said—"Bertie saw Reds under the Bed."

The New Deal was recognised as a Communist plot; "A band of conspirators," said McCormick, "plans to inflict this oriental atrocity upon our Republican people." The war on the New Deal has dominated the Colonel's mind and its extension, the paper, ever since.

Every column of the Tribune was thrown into the fight; from abroad Donald Day (who during the war broadcast for the Nazis) announced that Moscow was giving its full support to Roosevelt; in the comic strips "Little Orphan Annie" (the most moral tale since "Eric, or Little by Little") lisped the praises of free enterprise; one month before the 1936 elections the telephone operators were instructed to greet callers: "Good morning, only 28 more days to save the country." Roosevelt's majority in the nation and in Chicago was a record that year.

No Titles, Please

The only remedy McCormick could find for the foreign ideologies of the New Deal was a return to "Americanism." This holy doctrine stood in danger of overthrow by revolution—organised by Russia—and of corruption by heresy—organised by the British. The wily British sought to seduce America once more into the harlotry of Europe by the vulgar display of such geegaws as ancient castles and noble titles. So intoxicating, even to a true American, is the power of titles that their use has been forbidden in the Tribune since 1943. Thus, suddenly, the British Ambassador became Edward Wood, and even a fellow publisher reverted to plain Max Aitken. However, King George VI remains king George, for "king" is not a title but a badge of office, like colonel.

There have been thousands of attempts to solve the riddle of Tribune Tower: what makes the Colonel tick. Psychologists tend to see the explanation in his unhappy childhood, economic historians in his family background.

McCormick was born in 1880, the scion of two of Chicago's most important families—the McCormicks, whose ploughs had opened the mid-West prairie, and the Medills, who owned the Chicago Tribune. In Chicago he was, what by nature he longs to be, an aristocrat. But he first went to school at the age of nine, in England, where his father was attached to the Embassy. There he was not an aristocrat, but an outsider—worse, in 1889, a Yankee. A few years later, at exclusive Groton School, in New England, he found that he was not even a Yankee, but a mere "Sucker" from the hick town of Chicago, a fit subject for ridicule by eastern aristocrats, even if, like Franklin Roosevelt, they were a year his junior in school.

His Great Chance

The first people who were really kind to young Bertie were the people of Chicago, who elected him an alderman at the age of 24 and supported him through

(continued on next page)

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