

of Commons: for those early representatives of the people, when they had withdrawn from the presence of King and Court, learnt to discuss the royal requests amongst themselves, to consider public business, to make suggestions and to lay down conditions.

Here, hundreds of years ago, were the simple elements underlying the Queen's opening of her New Zealand Parliament: the summons to the Royal presence, the speech from the throne, and the withdrawal of the people's representatives to deliberate apart. In this country it is true the court itself has disappeared. There is no established upper class, and no hereditary Lords to take part in a stately procession or gather round the throne. The Upper House of Parliament itself has been abolished, and on the seats its members used to occupy sit the diplomats and distinguished individuals and their wives. As sole survivors of the ancient dignity which used to support the sovereign on such occasions, the judges sat in scarlet robes behind the throne. Yet the Queen was there, and the Usher of the Black Rod who, since the time of Henry VIII, has been the sovereign's personal attendant within Parliament Buildings. At her command he withdrew to summon the members of the House, and in the expectant hush went to the door that has been closed against him since the King's disastrous attempt in 1642 to arrest five recalcitrant members. He knocked thrice with his ebony staff, and was then admitted to deliver the Queen's message; and so the members filed into their places in her presence.

Now appeared the first big departure from tradition. In the ancient ceremonial the Commons are led by their Speaker to humble places below the bar of the House of Lords, while the Lord Chancellor, kneeling, hands to the Queen the speech which she is to read. In the New Zealand ceremony, two members of the House, the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition, detached themselves from their colleagues, and moved to "special" places beside the throne, where the Lords of Parliament used to sit; and it was the Prime Minister in person who delivered to the Queen the document which she read to Parliament and people. Ancient custom had been adapted to present reality. As in England, the sovereign formally set in motion the machinery of legislation; but the words were placed in her hands, not by a member of the Court, but by the Leader of the Commons, who had awaited the summons of Black Rod before approaching the Royal presence. And a further departure from custom followed. Traditionally the speech from the throne is Parliament's commission for action, and the Commons promptly withdraw to consider it. In New Zealand's Parliament, it was the Queen who rose, in dignified withdrawal, and it was only when she had passed from sight that Mr. Speaker led his fellow members back to their own chamber.

Here tradition resumed its sway. The Queen's address lay before them. To demonstrate that, with all loyalty, they were no subservient body, the House proceeded to take formal business—the swearing-in of new members and the first reading of a Bill which had nothing to do with the Queen's speech. The principle of Parliamentary independence asserted, the House proceeded to a briefly-debated and unanimous expression of loyalty in the Address-in-Reply, and to the passage of the briefest

possible Bill for the single purpose of obtaining the Queen's personal assent. And so closed a memorable sitting. In a sense it would have been more true to tradition if there had been some roughness present, and some heavy work forecast. The Commons fought their way to power by eternal vigilance, by making things awkward for king and councillors and for their own leaders. And a session of Parliament without serious and difficult work to perform would have been to our ancestors a contradiction in terms and a waste of time. Yet this was the first occasion when a Queen of New Zealand exercised in her capital city of Wellington the high functions of calling into counsel the representatives of the nation. The dominant note was unanimity of loyalty and the punctual performance of a stately ritual. Meantime beneath it all there flowed still in New Zealand the turbulent current of British political life which has proved the essential ingredient of our public liberties.

**RIGHT:** The Queen hands her speech to Sir Matthew Oram, Speaker of the House of Representatives, for safe keeping



N.P.S. photograph

## CRAFTSMANSHIP FROM CHRISTCHURCH

THE two thrones specially built for the opening of New Zealand's Parliament by Queen Elizabeth II will remain in the Council Chamber of Parliament House for the future use of Her Majesty's Governors-General. They will replace the venerable red-plush chairs from which sovereignty has been exercised in the past.

Designed and built in Christchurch, the new thrones (right) reveal a standard of craftsmanship not so uncommon in New Zealand as is generally believed. Their wooden parts are carved from New Zealand beech stained and polished to give the effect of old ivory, and the raised portions of the carving are picked out with gilt. The carver and builder of the thrones, Noel McCracken, took some 300 hours to complete his task. The gilding was done by J. A. Johnstone, of Canterbury University College's School of Art, an artist who once worked on the stalls of the Knights of the Thistle Chapel in Edinburgh.

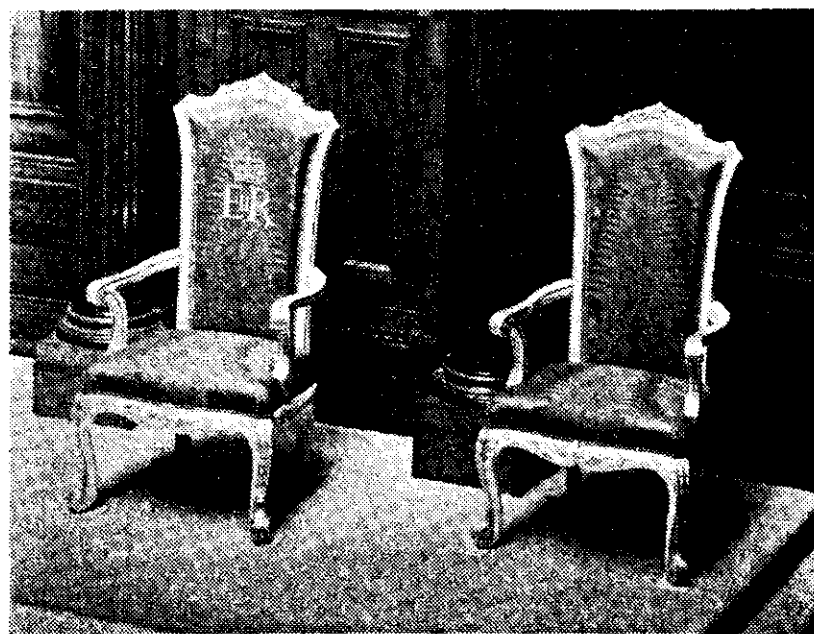
The upholstery of the thrones, of red damask, repeats the fernleaf and clematis motif of the carving. In the back of the Queen's throne is the Royal Cipher, hand-embroidered in gold-tinsel thread by Mrs. J. W. Newton, of Shannon.

In the Council Chamber of Parliament, the two thrones stand on a dais covered with golden carpet similar to

that used in Westminster Abbey. Immediately behind them is a dark-stained puriri canopy, and flanking them the somewhat lighter rimu walls of the chamber proper. The effect is of an island of light in the dignified gloom.

Presented by a New Zealander living in England, Sir Arthur Sims, the thrones

were planned by Heathcote Helmore, a Christchurch architect, and Noel McCracken, from designs drawn up in England at the time of the Coronation. The upholstery was executed by H. V. Hay. More than 500 hours of painstaking work went into their construction and finishing.



N.P.S. photograph