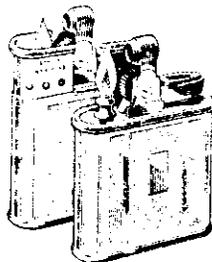


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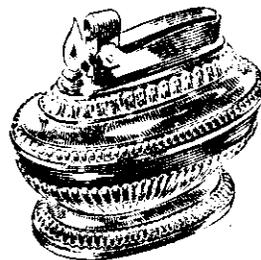
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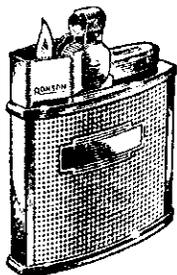
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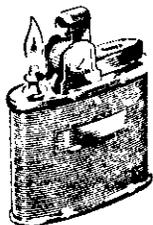
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## The Great Experiment

LAST week's conference of Commonwealth Prime Ministers was the seventh of its kind since the war-time meeting of 1944. When it is remembered that only five Imperial Conferences were held between the two world wars, it can be seen that the trend is towards more frequent and less formal discussion. This is in keeping with the dispersal of authority which has become a principle of growth within the Commonwealth. In New Zealand, perhaps, we do not always realise how delicately the system of negotiation reflects the changes of recent years. Many of us still think of the Commonwealth as a group of nations which share a common allegiance to the Crown. Beyond the Dominions are the colonial territories, destined for self-government. It therefore seems natural to speak of the British Commonwealth and Empire. But this practice is more favoured in some places than in others, and it cannot be universal.

To the concept of equality, which has given the growing organism its special character, must be added a new diversity.

Professor Mansergh believes that 1947—when the Asian countries became equal members—is a date in Commonwealth history as important as 1931. "The new and remarkable diversities in its subsequent membership demand a more sustained and imaginative effort to understand the outlook of the partner-nations than any required in the older, less complex Statute of Westminster Commonwealth. But unless that effort is made a unique experiment in international and in inter-racial co-operation may fail." All these partners are members of United Nations, and it cannot be doubted that experience within their own framework has enriched their contribution to world affairs. In itself, however, the Commonwealth has great power, actual and potential, as a unifying influence.

If it continues to develop as at present, moving into a wider circle of self-governing peoples, and held together—amid many diversities of race and culture—by common interests, the world will need no better model for co-operation. But the times are uncertain, and we have yet to see if methods of government derived from Britain can prevail against social attitudes that, in Asian countries, are much more deeply rooted in history. In the meantime the great experiment continues. We may not realise how far, in this new and changing Commonwealth, the Dominions are being urged by their own interests and their growing strength towards wider responsibilities. Yet that, undoubtedly, is the next phase; and it cannot be avoided if the Commonwealth is to survive.

Nicholas Mansergh, Smuts Professor of the History of the British Commonwealth in the University of Cambridge, has pointed out in his inaugural lecture\* that names are "symbols of aspiration and intention as well as of political realities." No single name could express with exactness the status of nations which in different ways are linked to Britain. Since 1949, a common allegiance to the Throne has ceased to be a condition of membership. Within the Commonwealth there is room not only for the Dominions, but also for the republic of India. For that nation, the Queen is not the Sovereign; she is simply Head of the

\*THE NAME AND NATURE OF THE BRITISH COMMONWEALTH, by Nicholas Mansergh; Cambridge University Press, English price 2/6.



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