

If the Princess Should Marry

I'M going to talk . . . about the speculative story of the week, the reports about an attachment which is supposed to exist between Princess Margaret and Group Captain Townsend . . . So far they're nothing but rumours. They have not been confirmed and they have not been denied. They have just recurred 20 months after the first report when Group Captain Townsend left the Royal Household of which he was a member and went to a post in Brussels . . . The story according to the rumours is short and human and not unusual. Emotions are not always easy to control, the affections especially. As we all know there are occasions when a mutual affection arises between two people in circumstances which are inconvenient or awkward. The awkward thing about this situation, if in fact it exists, is that Group Captain Townsend found it necessary to divorce his wife in November, 1952. That was an unfortunate ending to his marriage, but he was not the offending party and it is not something for which he can be held to blame in any way. He obtained his divorce in the usual way, as the law provides. Thousands of people do the same thing every year, and it is not held against them, particularly when the fault has not been their own, and when they have had a career as honourable and distinguished as that of Group Captain Townsend, who was an equerry to the Princess's father and who was made a Commander of the Royal Victorian Order while he was a member of the Royal Household.

The trouble is that the Church of England will not marry divorced persons, even innocent parties. In these circumstances, unless the rule could be relaxed in some way or another the marriage of the Princess and Group Captain Townsend would have to be a civil marriage. That, of course, is something which is very hard to visualise for the Queen's sister. The natural setting would be one of Britain's ancient churches and the wedding with the benediction of the church would be the sort of wedding which most of us want for our children. There would seem to be no choice between this and a civil ceremony. It would not be enough, or in the circumstances seemly, to find, as the Duke of Windsor did, a clergyman willing to perform the service despite the attitude of the Church. Then there is another complication. There's a very close link between the Church of England and the Crown of England. It's just as well to get the nature of this link quite clear. The Queen lately has often been described as the Head of the Church. I suppose that description's right enough, but as far as I have been able to inform myself it's a little misleading . . . The main fact seems to be that circumstances put a special duty on the Sovereign to show respect for the rulings of the Church in spiritual matters . . .

Things aren't made any easier by the events of 20 years ago when the Duke of Windsor abdicated. The abdication was a big shock to everybody. It was a bigger shock than it is easy to remember or to understand to-day, and it took the

Extracts from a recent commentary on the International News, broadcast from the Main National Stations of the NZBS

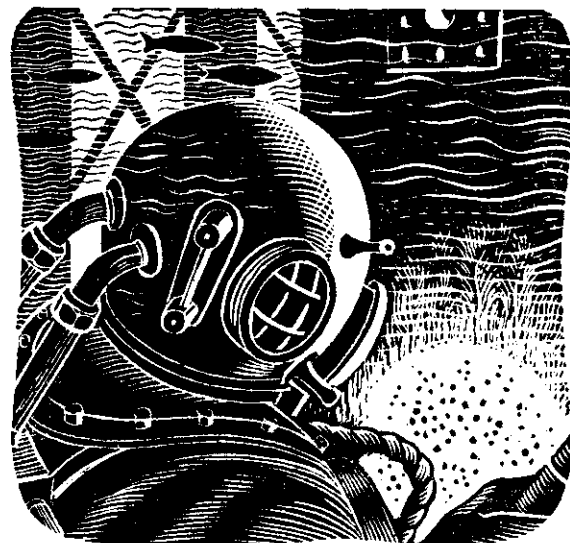
rest of the lifetime of the Duke's brother and the Princess's father to regain what was lost in those few weeks. The circumstances are not, of course, parallel. The Princess is not the Queen. The same hopes have not been put in her and the same things are not expected of her. The succession to the Throne is secure without her. Marriage to Group Captain Townsend would not involve the same problems, nor would it involve, as it seems at the moment anyway, her living out of England.

Members of the Royal Family, although members not quite so close to the Throne, have made marriages not dissimilar to a marriage between Princess Margaret and Group Captain Townsend . . . It needs some imagination to conceive Princess Margaret finding herself, in the same circumstances, Mrs. Peter Townsend. But the precedent is there for what it is worth, and if the eventuality should arise some sensible way out might no doubt be found.

Not all newspapers have published these reports, and the sensational newspapers in Britain and overseas have published stories which a good many people find offensive. But silence is not always the best course to follow. The silence of British newspapers, in Britain and in the Dominions, about the events which led up to the abdication was one of the most remarkable episodes in history. Voluntary censorship was imposed on themselves by themselves by even the most sensational newspapers. When finally the news of the Duke of Windsor's intentions was published it found the public and Parliament absolutely unprepared. It found the Duke himself unaware of public reaction and quite unable to assess it, and it was the same with every responsible person. The crisis came suddenly, deepened quickly, and was over before all the issues could be properly grasped. It is remarkable and it is a tribute to everybody involved, including those most closely concerned, that it was survived with dignity and decency. But it might have been better—looking back it seems almost certain that it would have been better—if there had been some public knowledge of what was likely to happen.

If there is anything in these reports about Princess Margaret and Group Captain Townsend at least public reaction is now available for those who have to make decisions. And I think we ought to remember that we live in a straightforward, honest age in which we don't resort to the hypocritical and unworthy arrangements that used to be made when royal personages found their affections engaged outside royal circles. We should remember whatever may happen that all those concerned have conducted themselves with real and becoming dignity and with a proper respect for the position of the Throne and for the standard set and maintained by the Queen's father and the Queen Mother.

—R. M. HUTTON-POTTS,
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MARINE BORER

Important jetties in Swansea Docks were being damaged by marine borer shipworms, which had gnawed their way into the wooden piles under water, honeycombing and weakening the entire structure. Immediate action was needed to save the jetties. The owners took their problem to the technical service organisation of I.C.I., and a representative of the Company's Nobel Division in Glasgow was sent to make an investigation. He began by experimenting with small charges of gelatine explosives fired at known distances from the piles. The shock wave from these underwater explosions had to be strong enough to kill the borers in their holes, but not so powerful as to weaken the jetty piles. After each shot a diver went down to look for signs of damage, and small sections of the wood were removed to assess the killing effect on the borers. The work went well and a local man who had studied the technique took over. These unorthodox methods were completely successful. The borers were killed and at low cost to the owners the safety of the jetties was ensured for another season.



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