

CROWN & COMMONWEALTH

I AM, of course, going to talk about Lord Altrincham and his journalistic activities. I don't suppose everybody in this country will find it a matter for gratification in the circumstances that the Altrincham family has links with New Zealand, but those links are very important in relation to the remarks made in the article. The author of the article is the second holder of the title. His grandmother, the first Lord Altrincham's mother, was a daughter of Sir Edward Deas-Thomson, who was Colonial Secretary of New South Wales, and his mother; the first Lady Altrincham was a daughter of Lord Islington, a British Liberal who was one of New Zealand's most enlightened Governors during a period when enlightened was not the adjective usually applied to Governors of this country. The first Lord Altrincham himself—he was better known as Sir Edward Grigg—increased this inherited and acquired knowledge of the way in which the Commonwealth association operated under the Crown through service in various posts. He was military secretary to the Prince of Wales during the Prince's visits to Canada, Australia and New Zealand. He was secretary to the Rhodes Trustees and he was Governor of the colony of Kenya. He was also a parliamentarian of some standing and a journalist of real ability.

It may seem a curious way to begin comments on an article by one man with a reference to the career and antecedents of another man, that is, of a man who did not write the article, but it's necessary to do this. All that the present Lord Altrincham has said may not be important, and some of it may be offensive, but some of it is very important indeed and the part that is important might very well be a word for word extract from an article published in the same periodical when his father was its editor. The unimportant and the really offensive passages in the article which has raised such a fuss are those which concern the Queen's method and manner of delivering her speeches in public. It's her custom to read a prepared speech, and, of course, she's either supplied with a speech, or helped in its preparation by some member of her household. The sum total of Lord Altrincham's criticism is that it would be better if the Queen did not read her speeches, and that it would be better if they could be phrased in a way that would not make her seem quite so formal or quite so remote from the people to whom she's speaking. There's nothing much wrong with that criticism, but it could certainly have been put more tactfully; there was no need to be so provocative or so deliberately impertinent. That said, I might as well add that I've no patience whatever with the viewpoint of people who regard any criticism as offensive and disloyal. I'm quite unaware of anything in the history of the great families from which the Queen is descended or in the history of the monarchy itself which suggests progress towards an ultimate inhuman perfection and puts the occupant of the throne beyond all criticism. After all, we're not like the Romans. We don't turn our kings or queens into gods, although I am tempted to the observation that in some spheres of activity we do seem to put into important jobs people quite as unsuitable for them as the Emperor Caligula's horse was unsuitable for his post as a consul of Rome, to which the Emperor appointed him.

That I gather is Lord Altrincham's complaint about some members of the Royal household; like Caligula's horse they're not really suited to the job, and in these days it's tremendously necessary that they should be suited to the job. That's because the British Empire and Commonwealth—for the time being there's still an empire and there's still a Commonwealth—is facing testing times. And that's because under the constitution of the United Kingdom and the laws of the Commonwealth countries there is nobody who is in a position to advise the Queen on Commonwealth matters as a whole. For that reason a great deal of importance attaches itself to the membership of her household, that is, to the background, the ability and the personality of those who are fortunate enough to find themselves in frequent contact with her. For this reason it's necessary to recall again that, except in its offensive aspect, the



LORD ALTRINCHAM

"An incidental impertinence may perhaps be forgiven"

article which has aroused so much discussion might well have been written—or approved of—by the very brilliant and experienced father of its author.

This criticism has now become very significant because the Empire and the Commonwealth is under intense strains of many different sorts, and because its continued existence in any shape at all is under real threat.

In the first place, Britain at the heart of the Commonwealth, has her back to the wall. Lord Bruce, of Melbourne, who was for six years Prime Minister of Australia, and who has been Chairman of Britain's Finance Corporation for Industry for 10 years, not long ago put the position very bluntly indeed. He pointed out that in the 10 years from 1945 to 1955 Britain had paid her way by borrowing and by gifts, and he asked this question: "Can we hope to go on for the next 10 years living on loans from others and on the charity of others?" Then he answered the question himself: "There's not a hope in the world that we can do anything of the sort." He followed this with a plea: "For heaven's sake get down to hard facts."

In the second place, as part of the remedy for this situation, Britain is now under pressure to join the European common market through a free trade area. The price of gaining entry to this

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The text, slightly abridged, of a "Look-out" talk by R. M. HUTTON - POTTS (right), broadcast on August 10



market looks like being the abandonment of many Commonwealth links in trade. In fact, the price is something like the end of effective Commonwealth co-operation in trade and business.

In the third place, in this reshaping of the Commonwealth and Empire that's now taking place, it's not easy to see exactly who is staying in and who is dropping out. That's especially true of the Asian members that have now become fully independent. The newest member is the African State of Ghana, which recently banned the Queen's message to Commonwealth youth, a decision which led the Leader of the Opposition in Ghana to ask: "Are we members of the Commonwealth or not?"

In the fourth place, in the vital place if I may put it this way, a totally new situation has arisen with the advent of a new government in Canada. The new Prime Minister has called on Canadians to shift 15 per cent of their purchases in the United States to British suppliers, and in this way to strengthen Britain's ability to buy Canadian wheat. This tremendous policy decision should be viewed in the light of what the President of the Glasgow Chamber of Commerce said about a fortnight ago. What he said was this: "Canada can close the sterling dollar gap at any moment. All she has to do is to switch less than 10 per cent of her present purchases from the United States to Britain." He then asked: "Will the new Canadian Government stand by and see American economic and financial forces slowly submerge Canada, or are they prepared to shoulder a Commonwealth responsibility commensurate with their strength? Canada more than any other country holds the key which would throw wide the door to increase Commonwealth trade."

These, then, are the circumstances in which we of the Commonwealth find ourselves. The bonds are loosening until in some instances they barely exist any longer. The big question is: Will the Empire and Commonwealth continue in existence, and, if it does, what countries will remain within it? Or, will the Commonwealth disintegrate and will Britain, under compulsion of circumstances, unite herself to Europe?

With Canada's decision it now seems that there is the bare possibility of a choice and the possibility of a continuing existence with some countries, including New Zealand, in close and effective co-operation. If the Commonwealth in this new shape is to continue in existence, who is to provide it with the necessary direction, and who is to help in providing that direction?

That brings me right back to the beginning of what I've had to say, that is, to the remarks made in the present Lord Altrincham's article, which might well have been made by his father about the composition of the Royal household. The composition of the Royal household is important because

the only association that is left to the Commonwealth now is the very loose association which is represented in the irregular meetings of the Ministers and Prime Ministers of the Commonwealth. These meetings are meetings of men who are responsible to their own Governments and Parliaments and cannot therefore speak with freedom and independence. . . Obviously the Commonwealth association is not only loose but also ineffective in many ways.

If impulse, and direction and drive are to come from anywhere they can only come, and they must come, from and through the Crown. Yet the constitutional position of the Queen does not make it easy to provide any of these things. Her difficulty is that under the constitution she is advised as Queen in the United Kingdom by the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. She is advised as Queen in New Zealand by the Prime Minister of New Zealand, and so on with all the countries that acknowledge her sovereignty. But—under the constitution—there is nobody to whom she can openly and lawfully turn for advice as head of that part of the Commonwealth which still acknowledges her as its head. Under the constitution even Prince Philip, who nowadays is probably the most knowledgeable man in the Commonwealth about the Commonwealth, is not allowed to offer her advice officially. But speaking from a long distance and with proper and very great respect I would imagine that she derives great strength and valuable information from the association which her marriage has brought her. I'm sure, too, that in these circumstances, a very great deal depends upon the knowledge, the ability and the varied capacities of the people who are in frequent touch with her. I'm certain that's why the first Lord Altrincham, with his very great and special knowledge, authorised pleas for so many years and so frequently in the *National and English Review* for a rearrangement of the Royal household to include Commonwealth members.

It's not my position to offer solutions, even if I could, but I would like to say that I think that things would be helped along greatly if there were more people in the position of Lord Bruce of Melbourne, able to speak freely by reason of their independent situation in the House of Lords and their acknowledged capacity in the leadership of their countries. The benefit derived from this might be greatly increased if their appointment were a conscious and deliberate part of the Commonwealth policy.

That said, I'd like to say just this one other thing. That is that in these tremendously difficult times Britain, and those parts of the Commonwealth which still give her allegiance, are fortunate to possess a Queen of whom it may be said, as it was said of the first Queen Elizabeth, that she is brave and sane to the heart of her, and that she has a husband with an infinite capacity to get at what Lord Bruce called the hard facts. If Lord Altrincham has done nothing else he has drawn attention to this fact with the implied authority of his brilliant, experienced and knowledgeable father. He has helped to show the Commonwealth what it needs; and, above all, he has revealed the dependence of the Commonwealth upon the throne for its continued existence. That is a service for which an incidental impertinence may perhaps be forgiven.