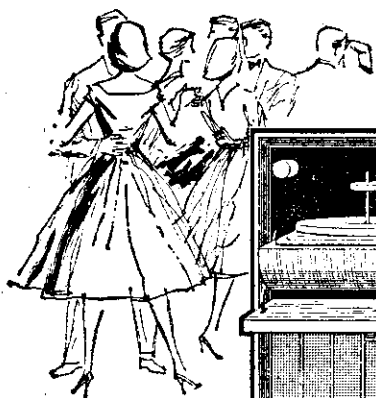


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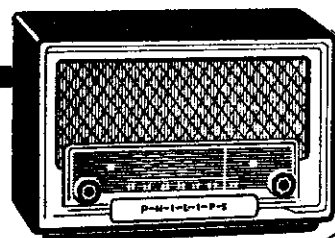
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NOVEMBER 8, 1957

## The Royal Dilemma

THE Queen's visit to Canada and the United States, which appeared to be completely successful, was followed by renewed criticism of Royal protocol in London newspapers. Columnists wanted to know why, if the Queen could be seen "strolling through the streets in Washington, walking into a self-service store, chatting to sales girls and customers, going about freely among ordinary people, meeting American reporters at a Press conference," the same things could not be done in Britain. A New York correspondent asked: "Will the policy just tried out on this side of the Atlantic be continued now that the Queen is home in Britain, or are we dreading to slide back into the old stand-offish ways?"

Members of the Royal Family—especially, perhaps, the Duke of Edinburgh—are aware of the need to draw closer to the people; and it has been made sufficiently clear that, if the opportunity is given them, they know how to use it without any loss of dignity and charm. But it is cruelly unjust to ask them to change the British character—and that, in effect, is exactly what some of the more strident critics are asking them to do. It is not hard to be relaxed or "free and easy" among the Americans: their approach to great occasions, even Royal ones, is uninhibited. Nor do they change when they go abroad. A Royal garden party for visiting American lawyers and their wives was recently transformed from its usual formality in ways which must have caused an acute lifting of eyebrows in some parts of Buckingham Palace. As in the United States, the Queen showed then that she can be both regal and informal when she feels around her an extrovert warmth. But the English are different, and the difference was suggested unintentionally by the columnist who spoke of "the old stand-offish ways."

The welfare state may eventually break down class distinctions, but there are few signs that this is happening. A weight of history expresses itself in traditions which many people scarcely understand, and yet follow with a respect that is almost instinctive. In a period when British power

has declined from its zenith, these traditions have an added strength. At the centre is a cluster of noble buildings, above all Buckingham Palace and Westminster Abbey; and the roads between them have seen pageantry for a thousand years. Kings and Queens have always moved against this background. The people love it, not only for its own sake, but also because it revives in them a sense of the nation's greatness. New Zealanders who have stood in London, hemmed in by vast and patient crowds, may wonder by what means, short of economic disaster, the historic relationship between Sovereign and people could be changed. The English are by nature "stand-offish": they can be as friendly as anyone else when communication has been established; but even the charming manners of the cultivated are at least partly a system of defence and concealment. In an environment where the public school, in spite of penal taxation, survives with remarkable tenacity, the spontaneous intercourse of the American scene would be a little odd and not quite—well, not quite...

Beyond all this there is a genuine dilemma. The Queen is Sovereign in other realms as well as in Britain; and although Australians and New Zealanders have inherited attitudes which might make them stop short of American informality during a Royal tour, they are more casual than the English, and may find it difficult to be reverent towards protocol if—as everybody hopes—Royal visits become more frequent. The monarchy belongs to the Commonwealth, and indeed can be influential beyond its islands and frontiers. In a world-wide community, where peoples of different character are sharing a common allegiance, the Sovereign's task cannot be kept within too rigid a pattern. Perhaps it is in the newer countries that modifications will first be perceptible. It seems unlikely that changes will be made in England, especially while newspapers call for reform in "one column, and in their other columns do everything possible—in the sacred name of circulation—to make reform seem undesirable.

—M.H.H.

N.Z. LISTENER, NOVEMBER 8, 1957.