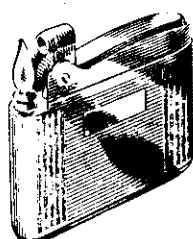


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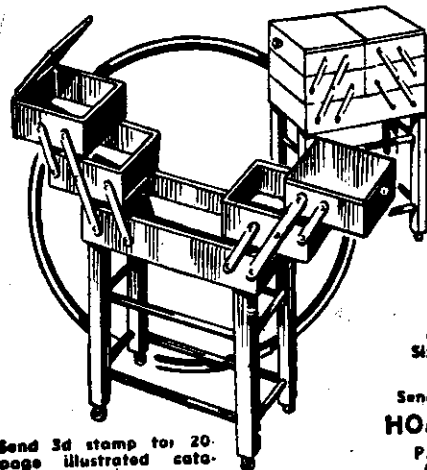
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The Crowning of the Queen

IT has been instructive to watch the approach of British peoples to the Coronation of their Queen. Some have thought the preparations too deliberate, and spread so widely that the occasion could be weakened by a strained expectation. Such doubts, however, could have been valid only if the Coronation were a spectacle, arranged for interest and entertainment. It is much more than that. There is splendid pageantry; but beyond it are meanings and deep feelings which the people, even if they cannot always explain them, know to be the heart and centre of national experience.

The British monarchy is very old. It goes back to 829, when all England was brought under the rule of King Egbert. In more than 1100 years it has been suspended for only one brief interval, from 1649 to 1660, when the country was a Commonwealth. Since then the nation has become an empire, and Commonwealth is now a word with a larger and better meaning. As the nation has grown and changed, the monarchy has changed with it, until today it embodies with perfect fitness the British conception of constitutional leadership. Government is in the hands of men who are directly responsible to public opinion, and who can be dismissed from office when they lose the people's confidence. But the State remains, and must have its head—"a permanent symbol of the community," writes Sir Ernest Barker, "and a constant magnet for its loyalty, who represents permanently . . . the continuity of the national life and the unity of the national purpose." In earlier times a king could say, "I am England," and could mean quite literally that he controlled its resources and power, though even in feudal days his rule was never entirely without impediment and restraint. Today the Queen could use the

same words with a different meaning but with equal truth. She is England and the Dominions in the sense that in all those realms she is both supreme and representative.

When the people stand in the streets of London and cheer Queen Elizabeth II as she goes to her Coronation they will be paying tribute to their young Sovereign. The feeling they have for her will be personal, for the symbolism of her station is expressed in what she says and does, and like her father before her she works nobly, and is greatly loved. But on that day the people will feel that they too are England, and that what is enacted before them is part of a long and splendid story. Every phase of the pageant which might now seem to be old and outworn has been at some time an element of national life. It stays alive in symbolism because its meaning has not become archaic with the form that was once its seemly vesture. There is nothing old-fashioned in faith, loyalty, duty and service; and it is their allegiance to what is old and true that keeps British people unshaken in a sea of troubles.

The Coronation shows us again the long way that has been travelled. It reveals to us the greatness of the past and our proper place in a procession that goes on when the banners have been put away and the trumpets are silent. British people are spread throughout the world, but they are not cut off from the beating of that strong heart in London. On June 2, as they gather around their receiving sets, they will feel the almost mystical sense of unity which suddenly takes form and colour, and is comprehensible, when the Crown is placed reverently on the Queen's head. And they will not be silent when "at the sight whereof the people, with loud and repeated shouts, shall cry: 'God Save the Queen.'"

N.Z. LISTENER, MAY 29, 1953.