

This last is no small thing, for, when divisions rack the world, plain friendship between nation and nation is worth more than we often realize.

A somewhat cynical observer once wrote: "The Commonwealth appears.....to be no more than an alumni association....whose independent-spirited, self-willed members, presided over by their former headmaster, recognize no other obligations toward one another than may be prompted by the heart or by considerations of enlightened self-interest." While we may concede a certain half-truth to this analysis, it confuses form with substance, and it passes over too casually the pull of sentiment and custom and enlightened self-interest, which draws us together. Shakespeare put our case better when he wrote: "Those friends thou hast, and their adoption tried, grapple them to thy soul with hoops of steel."

Of course, we of the Commonwealth enjoy the friendship of many nations outside it, but there is a special, certainly indefinable quality in the Commonwealth relationship. This is derived from our history, from the memory and the present experience - of great struggles honourably shared; even from deep differences and conflicts honourably settled.

There is something else. For all our local differences, the characteristic approach of Commonwealth countries to national and international problems combines liberty with authority and tempers firmness with reason. We still endeavour to govern in the spirit of Magna Carta, and, on maintaining parliamentary institutions which differ little one from another, preserving the rule of law, and respecting the fundamental rights of individuals. Whatever the reasons may be, we in the Commonwealth respect one another, sit down easily together to talk over common problems, and get a great number of important things done in an informal but effective way. Even when we disagree, we usually do so with understanding and without bitterness.

The Commonwealth has adjusted itself pragmatically and gracefully to a long series of changing circumstances. I do not suggest that we should be complacent about this; even the most adaptable species is mortal and there are pitfalls ahead. But if the Commonwealth remains in step with the evolution of our time, I am sure that it can face the future with hope and with confidence.

So, as the Coronation approaches, we can all say: "Long live the Commonwealth. God Save The Queen."

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