

from which they sprang. The history of the nations which compose the modern Commonwealth is a fascinating history, of great variety. Over the years it records a course from colony to nation, from the gradual achievement of local autonomy to the final establishment of independent sovereignty in the loose association which is the modern Commonwealth.

While bearing a direct relationship to the events which preceded 1776 in this country, the processes by which the peoples of the Commonwealth countries achieved their present situation differed markedly from that which led to the Declaration of Independence and the establishment of this Union. For one thing, the statesmanship which over the years contrived our modern arrangements was largely a co-operative effort between colonial and imperial politicians. Whether or not governments in London drew the right lessons from the American Revolution, there can be no doubt that many English statesmen played a constructive role in the evolution of a new conception of Empire. This is not to say that in all of the nations of the Commonwealth there were no difficulties with imperial Britain. Even in Canada, we had our sharp differences and difficulties with the British. And in other parts of the old Empire, notably in the Indian sub-continent, there was a long struggle - and sometimes violent episodes - before national independence was established.

Each of the present national units in our association contributed to the evolution of the finished Commonwealth pattern. Canada was the first of the former colonies to achieve full independence. The First World War hurried on the final stages of the process when our right to full control over our foreign relations was established. At the Imperial Conference of 1926 it was recorded as a matter of fact that all members of the Commonwealth - which then meant Great Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa - were "equal in status" and "freely associated". And this declaration was pinned down into legal form in what was called the Statute of Westminster in 1931.

The Asian countries of the modern Commonwealth, however, followed a different course. Unlike the Commonwealth countries in North America, Africa and Australasia, the Indian sub-continent was never colonized. Its great populations retained their ancient cultures and racial character. Alone of the seven present sovereign countries of the Commonwealth, these peoples in the old Empire engaged in a long and often bitter struggle for independence, before three new nations were carved out of the old Imperial India. That the wounds of such a struggle could be healed so quickly and that India, Pakistan, and Ceylon could voluntarily choose to remain within the Commonwealth is, surely, however, a tribute to the statesmanship of London as well as to that of New Delhi, Karachi, and Colombo.

The present Commonwealth was then achieved, not without differences and even armed revolt in some quarters. But it was essentially a process of evolution and adaptation to changing circumstances and needs. It was not on