The British Commonwealth of Nations is not just an empty phrase or a polite term to end the British Empire. On the contrary it contains the substance and heart of matters that can with wisdom and foresight lead to a more permanent peace in this unsettled world.

The old Empire contained Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and Canada as self-governing Dominions. England’s many colonies were governed from the British Colonial Office not because there was any wish to deny them complete self-government but because they had not reached the state of economic development and political stability that makes democratic self-government possible.

Since the last world war the old British Empire and Commonwealth has given way to the great new British Commonwealth of Nations. In addition to the old partners, there are now many completely new self-governing Dominions. This is not the result of any startling new policy, it is the result of careful and thoughtful policies begun many years ago and that could only show result after long years of hard work and patient effort. India, Pakistan and Ceylon are three great new self-governing Dominions whose leaders attend the Prime Ministers’ Conference as equal partners with our own Prime Minister. Ghana, once the Gold Coast of Africa and now the youngest Dominion, the newest partner in the British Commonwealth was also represented and on 31st August of this year the Federation of Malaya will also receive full Dominion status. In the not too distant future we may also expect to see the Central African Federation, and the Federation of the West Indies become full partners in the Commonwealth.

The Commonwealth Prime Ministers meet, they exchange views, discuss differences, and no one of them by virtue of position is leader - all are equal. Their communiqués do not say very much at the close of conferences but this would help to encourage frankness amongst the different leaders. When they have agreement this is recorded, when they agree to differ they understand each other’s point of view. This much is also important because when we look at the composition of the British Commonwealth we must realize that there can be few great problems in the world that are not also found within the Commonwealth. Perhaps the difference between the world and the Commonwealth is that quietly and unheralded the Commonwealth is doing much to solve those problems.
In the British Commonwealth there are more black people than white, there is a strong possibility that there will be more black Prime Ministers than white at future conferences. Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Canada and England white. India, Pakistan, Ceylon, Ghana, the Federation of Malaya black and there are sure to be new additions of coloured people from Africa and West Indies. Representatives of nearly every race are found as equal partners within the Commonwealth. Religious differences within the Commonwealth are as great as those in any other part of the world, think of India, Pakistan and Kashmir. Despite these vast differences, the leaders of these different peoples meet in London to discuss their problems and their difficulties. They meet as equals as members of one Commonwealth, being completely independent and yet having some bond of unity difficult to describe. On some things they agree, on others they differ, but this is only to be expected when the differences in race, religion and background are taken into account.

The very fact that, being so different, they meet the way they do as members of the British Commonwealth of Nations is a lesson to the rest of the world.

The British Commonwealth is showing how different peoples, despite great problems between them, can get on together to the advantage of each member. If the Commonwealth can also show the world how these problems can be solved, it will have given the world a gift more valuable than the gift of self-government to the once colonial members of the new British Commonwealth.

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