

shows that their suspicions were fully justified. Salisbury thought that 'those Colonists sadly want taking down a peg'. Lord Hugh Cecil wrote of 'transoceanic mediocrities' — 'windy-minded underbred spouters' who formed 'the common type of Colonial politician'. Of course there was some truth in the view that colonial politicians were often vulgar windbags, and that few colonists were knowledgeable about international questions. Earl Grey, Governor-General of Canada, thought in 1908 that only three Canadians had any grasp of the details of Canada's external relations: one who drank, one who was inarticulate and one who was 'a really first class official'. But the 'windy-minded spouters' the British authorities had met included Reeves and Alfred Deakin, men whose reading, intelligence and thoughtfulness were outstanding by any standards. British arrogance was one of the greatest foes of British empire.

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*The History of the Royal Commonwealth Society.* By Trevor Reese. Oxford University Press, 1968. 292 pp. U.K. price: 45s.

IN THE LATE nineteenth and early twentieth centuries a number of societies and clubs were formed in Great Britain either to promote imperial union or to further knowledge about the empire. One of the first and most active of these bodies was the Royal Commonwealth Society founded in 1868 (as the Royal Colonial Institute) in response to Gladstone's alleged separatist inclinations. The Society's rooms and especially its magnificent library have long harboured scholars from all over the world and many of them have often regretted that no account existed of such an important private institution. This gap has now been admirably filled by Dr Trevor Reese who has written a lucid readable book which happily lacks the parochial turgidity common to institutional history.

Dr Reese has been concerned to set the Society and its activities in the proper context of empire-commonwealth development. In this he has succeeded extremely well and the account of the Society's problems and doings is always tightly interwoven with the wider canvas. Today the Society is essentially a social and educational body but in its early years much of its energies was devoted to propaganda. The Society took an active and at times fruitful interest in the annexation of Fiji, French and British fishing rights in Newfoundland waters, the crisis over New Guinea, the first colonial conferences and, of course, imperial federation. It was during the pre-1914 period that the difficulty became obvious of remaining a private body which had 'Royal' on its letter-head and to which many political figures belonged, while conducting or promoting public discussion of sensitive political problems. Members of the Society's executive who were also prominent in the civil service or the Liberal government either resigned or ceased to attend over the issue of political discussion of colonial affairs. Since the first war the Society has confined its activities to the promotion of migration and trade and to brief comments on sensitive issues of the day such as closer union in East Africa and independence for India. More recently it has provided facilities for those wishing to debate whether in fact 'the Commonwealth is a farce'.

The Society has undergone considerable change in its one hundred years but little has altered its essentially anglo-saxon, white settler orientation. Until recently the dominions and the expatriate white colonial communities were of more concern to the Society than India or Africa. This is perhaps not unexpected in a body which traditionally drew its membership from the peerage, the nobility, the clergy and the ex-colonial service. Only in the sixties have Africans and Indians frequented the Society in any number, but not yet in sufficient strength to alter the racial imbalance. The Society has always been of Conservative hue with little appeal to Labour and so it remains today. It is, as Dr Reese points out, 'a middle class organisation with a strong leavening of the well-born'. Hopefully this will change if the Society wishes to remain an important private focal point in London for citizens of the Commonwealth. Perhaps its best work in the future can be done, as Dr Reese argues, in the fields of education and scholarship. The Society already possesses the largest private library on the Commonwealth in the world. This in itself is a significant step toward the creation of a major research institute.

To this reviewer one of the more important and interesting of the Society's activities has been the publication of its journal, variously titled *Proceedings, United Empire* and, today, the *Journal of the Royal Commonwealth Society*, in which colonial officials, retired civil servants and military and naval officers, British cabinet ministers, colonial and Commonwealth politicians and Prime Ministers have allowed their thoughts to escape into print. These volumes are a rich source for the student of the empire-commonwealth and it is regrettable that Dr Reese in his otherwise splendid book did not exploit them more fully. For surely the attitudes and assumptions revealed in those pages are crucial to our understanding of the Commonwealth's development. If Dr Reese had explored this intellectual dimension of the Society and thus of the Commonwealth he might have thrown some much needed light on why rather than how people acted, or perhaps even more important, why they did not act. But this is no place to suggest the book Dr Reese might have written. He is to be congratulated for the one he has produced; it should find its place in the library of every Commonwealth historian.

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*Smuts, II: The Fields of Force 1919-1950.* By W. K. Hancock. Cambridge University Press, 1968. xiii, 529 pp. U.K. price: 70s.

IN HIS PREFACE to the second volume of *Smuts Vol. II: The Fields of Force, 1919-1950* Hancock points out that these years of South African history have been 'little illuminated by historical study'. In concluding his biography of Smuts, Hancock has offered his own outstanding contribution to a process of enlightenment. Rejecting the labels conventionally and inaccurately applied to Smuts, he has recreated a figure more complicated, more credible and more interesting than the one recreated by Smuts's earlier biographers. The scope of the study is wide, reflecting the different 'fields of force' in which Smuts was active, most notably those of imperial statesmanship and Union politics. The focus of attention is properly Smuts