

## SOME PUBLICATIONS

ON THE AIR, 'a study of Broadcasting in Sound and Television' by Roger Manvell (Andre Deutsch, 16s.) provides a valuable summary of radio history up to now and a grammar for its criticism. Dr Manvell rightly remarks that 'we love the sound of the word "truth", but prefer the critical search of it to be postponed from day to day', and he emphasizes the lack of 'serious consideration to the special principles involved in broadcasting'. Too often such criticism as exists is in terms of the personalities which radio so powerfully fosters, and the responsible analysis of television as a medium in its own right is an intellectual analysis most uncongenial to columnists. Dr Manvell, whose critical work on the Cinema has already produced such valuable results, deals realistically with such serious problems as that of freedom of expression and the inherent dangers of the B.B.C. monopoly. He criticizes, for instance, the elaborate good manners of religious broadcasting, and frankly considers that 'broadcasting tends to promote a vague and weak form of Christian practice instead of a faith fighting against the heaviest odds of sheer indifference it has ever been called upon to face since the invasion of Europe by the Vandals'. On 'the potentialities of television' Dr Manvell has much to say that is important. He dismisses the vaguer claims for television as 'a new art-form'. It is a new means of communication, and one that has the special opportunity of reaching small groups in their homes. 'The television critic cannot pay too much attention to the conditions imposed by this audience.' Dr Manvell's acute understanding of the technical problems of broadcasting, together with his adult awareness of its social significance, provide precisely the sort of introduction to radio criticism that is now urgently necessary.

The B.B.C. has from the beginning realized its cultural responsibilities as a public corporation, though indeed it has sometimes been hampered by the privileged position it enjoys as a monopoly. But the *B.B.C. Quarterly* (2s. 6d.) is a useful vehicle for critical discussion of a serious sort, and the latest issue provides, for instance, information about the Italian Third Programme and some provocative 'Reflections on Broadcast Talks' by Peter Fleming. Mr Fleming maintains that 'too many talks are expository and too few illustrative', and any issue of *The Listener* provides evidence that this is so. But *The Listener* must be regarded as one of the B.B.C.'s principal achievements, and its recent twenty-fifth birthday number was a reminder of how much we owe to the ceaseless torrent of B.B.C. talks, and of how easily it has come to be taken for granted. The same is true of the B.B.C. Broadcasts to

Schools, which are admirably served by a series of pamphlets, most intelligently edited and illustrated. Such a programme as *Looking at Things* is provided with a handsome companion brochure, with excellent examples of modern design. It is the sort of programme which, of course, a future television service for schools would be able to present with graphic directness, but it must remain a matter for gratitude that the B.B.C. and the School Broadcasting Council have shown great caution in not immediately embarking on television programmes when as yet their possibilities can only be guessed at. As for television in general, a 'technical description' (*The B.B.C. Television Service*, 2s. 6d.) provides a wealth of information in intelligible language and is a good example of the sober competence which distinguishes the B.B.C. from the hectic publicity of American radio. The debate for and against competitive television does not always recognize the positive value of the B.B.C.'s consistent sense of responsibility. It may not always make for excitement, but it is at least accurate.

Among the multiple activities of UNESCO, 'mass communications' occupy a prominent place, and the professed aims of perhaps the most constructive of United Nations organizations include the use of sound radio and television as means of fostering international understanding. An impressive list of publications (obtainable in Great Britain through H. M. Stationery Office and in U.S.A. through the Columbia University Press) includes *Television, A World Survey* (9s. 6d.). Here are gathered together all the available details of television services throughout the world, and one can meditate on a statistical picture which gives such facts as the twenty-two million television receivers now in operation in the United States and the 'typical broadcast day' of an American station ('12.00. Ruth Lyons' 50 Club: folksy chatter-type programme with music'). UNESCO is naturally concerned with the possibilities television offers for international co-operation, but the varying definitions which European countries have adopted are a serious handicap (though converters were successfully used to make the Coronation programme available throughout Western Europe, and are to be used again in an international exchange planned for next June). The *Survey* truly observes that television can have a valuable function to perform in bridging the gap between specialization and a largely uninformed public, and what is needed is 'not only popularization but even more integration, a broader view which provides fundamental understanding of the forces at work and of the ideas and concepts which guide individual disciplines'. Such aims may seem far removed from the endless stream of easy entertainment which provides the bulk of television broadcasting, but already even American opinion is being directed to a more serious sense of television as a medium of

intelligent (and intelligible) communication, and since 1952 the Federal Communications Commission has reserved 242 channels for non-commercial educational stations, though financial backing for such stations has so far been hard to obtain. A useful feature of this detailed *Survey* is the documentation it provides on the difficult question of sponsored programmes. The fact that advertisements have so often vulgarized American television, and have created such a chaotic state of affairs as exists in Cuba, should not prejudice the argument for a measure of competition as essential to prevent the obvious dangers of monopoly. The Canadian system, for instance, seems to preserve a balance between official control and a measure of private enterprise. But a multiplication of television facilities presents the serious dilemma of finding adequate material, for the consumption rate of television is immensely extravagant and inevitably leads to low standards of production.

Among other useful UNESCO publications, mention must be made of *Training for Radio* (2s. od.) by Maurice Gorham, a contributor to this issue of BLACKFRIARS. Mr Gorham's wide experience, both in sound and television broadcasting, entitles him to speak with authority, and his handbook is a practical and enlightened account of what can be done to achieve standards of production which shall match the responsibilities of both media. There are interesting appendices which give details of the B.B.C. courses in broadcasting technique and of American university courses in radio.

Also published by UNESCO is *Television and Education* (6s. od.), a study of American practice by Charles Siepmann, which reflects the optimism with which the doubtful blessing of television (educationally speaking) has been accepted. It seems to be agreed that television has seriously affected children's reading, though it is claimed that as yet there is no significant difference between the educational achievement of 'viewing' and 'non-viewing' children. It is estimated that a majority of American children spend nearly four hours on weekdays, and more than five hours on Saturday and Sundays, viewing television programmes. This is in fact no longer than they spend at school, and its consequences can as yet be only guessed at. *The Child Audience* (11s. 6d.), a UNESCO 'Report on Press, Film and Radio for Children', provides ample evidence of the immense influence of these media on children and, fortunately, of the growing awareness in almost every civilized country of the need for vigilance in their use. The use of radio (and presently of television) in 'fundamental education' is of great importance in undeveloped areas, and a study of the subject by J. Grenfell Williams (4s. od.) is a fascinating account of what has been achieved, even though the claims of one African listener seem excessive.

He writes: 'If you have bad thoughts in you or are fond of fighting others when you get your own set and listen in you can forget and stop all your bad ways'. If that were so, much of UNESCO's occupation would be gone, and the world would be unquestionably a happier place.

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## REVIEWS

THE IDEA OF PROGRESS. A Revaluation. By Morris Ginsberg. (Methuen; 6s.)

In theory there are two ways of believing in progress: one may believe either that the state of mankind is automatically bound to improve because such is the nature of things; or that it may improve, but only if men freely and consciously set themselves to improve it. The former view, taken literally, has perhaps never been held by anyone in his right mind, but it may be the logical consequence of certain metaphysical premisses, and Professor Ginsberg is inclined to consider it the consequence of belief in divine Providence; which is why, as a believer in progress, he is concerned to detach progress, and the belief in it, from religion. He has the further reason for attempting this that he evidently thinks Christianity too other-worldly to provide motives for improving this world; and this oft-repeated charge, one notes, is not the less effective, and therefore important, for being mistaken. The relevance to 'progress' of the doctrine of the Incarnation Professor Ginsberg does not discuss, and perhaps this is not surprising; but even the beneficial effects of Christianity in the natural order he only admits in a sense that discredits Christianity; they were due, he suggests, not to Christianity itself but to the circumstance that Christianity was 'fertilized by contact with rational thought', without which it would probably never 'have emerged from . . . resignation and other-worldliness'.

Not that this anti-Christian point (very discreetly proposed) is the main contention of this able little book; but the author has to get Christianity (as he conceives it) out of the way, just as he has to get out of the way all forms of belief (theological, metaphysical and even biological) in some law of progress inherent in the nature of things, so as to leave room for his moderately rationalist view that, within limits, man can make his own history, create his own earthly kingdom. 'The choice', he insists, 'is ours.' 'We know of no general law of progress'; but if we wish we can develop 'in a direction which satisfies rational criteria of value'. And this is his definition of progress.