

WHEN WOMEN SPEAK— Do Listeners Reach For The Switch?

"IN things that are tender and unpleasing," said Bacon, "it is good to break the ice by some whose words are of less weight, and to reserve the more weighty voice to come in as by chance." But when N. C. Tritton, Pacific Intelligence Officer to the BBC, was recently asked about the use of women announcers in the BBC's foreign news services, he gave another point of view.

"There are large and small communities, within and without the British Commonwealth," he said, "where there are strong objections of custom or religion to women taking part in public life. One only has to think of certain Asian communities. News or commentaries given in a female voice would be objectionable to those communities, but a male voice is acceptable everywhere."

Nevertheless, there are increasing numbers of women employed on the announcing staffs of the BBC, Mr. Tritton told "The Listener." "We are very pleased with the women announcers; I don't know what they sound like to you here, but to us in London they sound very fine. The chief criticism of their work is that women are more often tempted to elocute and speak affectedly than men are. Marjorie Anderson and 'Georgie' Henschel are well known to listeners in the Pacific service, and if you can judge by the fan mail they get, they are very successful. They don't only get letters—they get all sorts of eatables as well, to the envy of the men. As a matter of fact I've enjoyed fan-mail butter myself."

With this information as a basis, we set out to get some comments about those groups which have, or have had, or tend to have objections "of custom or religion," to women's voices on the air. We present the results below.

IN INDIA

SEEKING information on India's attitude, we spoke to a woman who spent 15 years in India. She was astonished at any suggestion that a woman's voice would, in these modern times, be objectionable to the people of India, whether Mohammedan or Hindu.

"Certainly both the Mohammedans and the Hindus keep their women in seclusion," she said, "but there are many women active in public life in India, and as far as I can say, it wouldn't make the slightest difference whether the radio spoke with the voice of a man or of a woman. Certainly not among educated Indians, anyway, though the people who are still closely bound by tradition would have a prejudice against women announcers. Still, it wouldn't be any more than the prejudice you get here in New Zealand."

IN CHINA

THE Chinese Consul-General in Wellington did not feel prepared to give us a statement on the question, lacking recent factual information, but William Wah, of the Chinese Association in Wellington, said that women announcers were frequently heard on the smaller local stations in China, and "they make a very good job of it too." Mr. Wah mentioned that before the Japanese occupation, the news from Hong Kong was competently read by a woman.

IN AMERICA

THE National Broadcasting Company of America has a representative here, Mervin K. Slosberg, and we asked him about women in radio in the United States. "There are very few engaged in routine announcing," he said. "Perhaps it's because they don't register over the mike so well, but anyway, they are not much used for regular announcing, although there are any number of women on the air as personalities—and highly-paid personalities at that."

JEWISH ATTITUDE

RABBI F. KATZ, of Wellington, told us that women announcers are used in Palestine, and are "very acceptable" to the Jews there. The old distinction, an Oriental idea rather than a peculiarly Jewish one, was now dropped almost entirely, and only the ultra-orthodox communities continued to exclude women from synagogue choirs. Most synagogue choirs nowadays are mixed, he said.



"The real reason for the distinction, which was made when the Jewish people were distinctly in touch with Oriental influence, is rooted in modesty. The Jews believed that a woman should not be used in a provocative manner—that when a woman sang for instance, she might arouse feelings other than devotional."

WHAT ST. PAUL SAID

BEFORE approaching representatives of Christian religions, we refreshed our memory of what St. Paul said on the subject of women in church (Cor. 14, 34-35):

"Let your women keep silence in the churches; for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law."

"And if they will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church."

PRESBYTERIAN

A MINISTER of a Presbyterian church said that by tradition his Church was rather against women taking an active part in the conduct of religious services, and that there are no female elders, but that in very special circumstances, women do enter the pulpit.

"I find it very seldom that a woman speaker is as impressive as a man, and I do feel that women are more inclined to listen to men than men are inclined to listen to women," he said. "Also, women are the severest critics of women speakers. On the other hand, I heard Maud Royden take a three-hour service in London, and it was one of the most impressive things I have ever heard."

ROMAN CATHOLIC

THE Catholic Church, according to a priest we approached, does not have to concern itself with the problem, because, although women have their part within the organisation of the Church, they take no part in the religious services. Mass is always conducted by an ordained priest, but in religious houses of women, devotional exercises, though not the Mass itself, are conducted by the women.

ANGLICAN

A CHURCH of England representative, Archdeacon A. B. Bullock, produced another quotation from St. Paul to counter the one on women speaking in church.

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