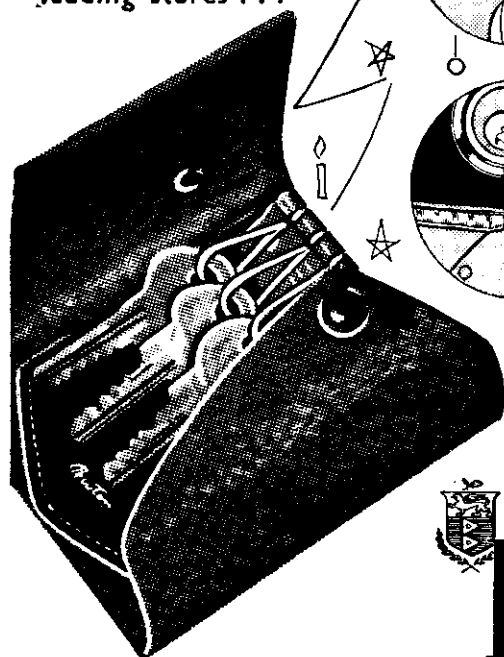


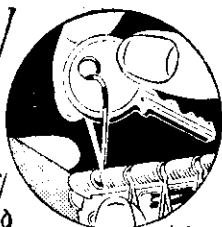
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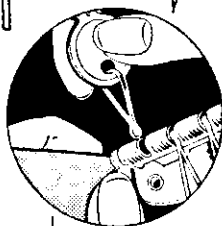
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Machines in the Schools

WHEN it was announced recently in London that the BBC was planning school television broadcasts, care was taken to explain that there was no intention of making teachers "unnecessary." Television lessons will be supplementary, and teachers will be left to decide the best ways of using the service. The reassurance was by no means superfluous. New forms of communication are treated carefully by people concerned with education or the arts. Some critics believe that the wider use of machines in education will bring in standardised teaching: they have visions of the horrid world described by Aldous Huxley and George Orwell, in which "sight and sound" become the instruments of a vast and oppressive surveillance.

Scientists are indeed useful to dictators; but there would be little progress if new inventions were left unused because men feared they might fall into the wrong hands. The last word has not been spoken on radio when we are reminded of jammed wavelengths and strident propaganda in the darker parts of Eurasia.

The cultural results of television are more doubtful, though here too we may take comfort from what has been done with films and radio. Many people believed that the cinema would kill the theatre, whereas after the first shocks of novelty and adjustment it released the theatre for its true purposes. The plays of ideas and poetry could not have flourished on a dying stage. Similarly, the fear that canned music would destroy performance seems to have been groundless in years which everywhere have brought large new audiences to symphony concerts. Critics were even heard to

say that literature would be weakened by radio, since people would become listeners instead of readers. We have found instead that radio has introduced millions of new readers to the classics of fiction, poetry and drama. And there is a large unsatisfied demand for new writing. Behind all the complex processes of radio, film and television studios there must still be an impulse from creative minds. Machines can transmit and reproduce, but they cannot invent: the composer and the writer are still, and always will be, the indispensable figures.

Nevertheless, the possible effect of television on education cannot be treated lightly. The real danger is not in the use which may be made of it in the schools, where it can be controlled and wisely directed. What is most to be feared is excessive "looking" or "viewing" in the home, and its effects on the child's habits of thought and study. Images thrown on a screen demand full attention, but the attention is on the surface. It may be found that even when the child is being taught, and not merely entertained, he will come to expect all things to be made visible to him, and will have a weaker hold on the imagination, which is the true creative faculty, the indispensable element of learning. But these possibilities can be exaggerated. Modern children have been exposed to mechanical influences which, if gloomier predictions had been fulfilled, should have turned them long ago into monstrous little robots. They are anything but that: indeed, they are very like their fathers. We suspect that the truth they will bring home to us in the scientific age is the ancient and endlessly surprising adaptability of the human race.

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