



ONE question that has continually bothered me while watching television in England has been "Does the television screen make the artists look older or younger, and is it flattering or otherwise?" Now at last my curiosity has been satisfied, because I have been to the studios at Alexandra Park and have seen the artists in the flesh and on the screen at one and the same time.

It was an afternoon session called "About the Home" and consisted of three programmes, "Training the Pup," "Cooking" and "About the Shops." It was due to start at three o'clock, but I was there well before 2.30 to make sure that I did not miss any interesting preliminaries. The television studio is a huge room and looks just like the pictures we have seen of Hollywood film studios. Everywhere there were huge cameras and lamps of all sizes, shapes and descriptions, all with their electric leads snaking around the floor and intricately jumbled. Technicians wearing earphones were bending about testing things and there were other people coming and going whose tense expressions indicated that they were very responsible for the productions.

At about 2.30 a young man, made up neatly with greasepaint and the usual theatrical facial, went to one end of the room and stood nonchalantly in front of a large camera. Then about six brilliant lamps flashed upon him revealing every pore in his skin and every hair of his fair moustache. For many people this would have been disastrous, but he was an even featured, good-looking young man and his unperturbed demeanour was fully justifiable. As the bright lights glowed fiercely on him he kept muttering to himself the lines of introduction he had prepared to open the session. They

purred smoothly and quietly from his lips and were so perfect in phrase and inflexion that repetition seemed almost a sacrilege. Yet, in this unperturbed way he kept repeating his lines, oblivious of the measuring eyes upon him. Just near there was a television screen and this was turned on to test the young man's face as it would be reproduced for viewers. Critical eyes peered

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at the screen, then someone moved to the young man and made a slight adjustment to his tie. The points of his collar were examined by someone else for perfect symmetry, and were given a few pokes and pushes. This minute adjusting of tie and collar-points went on for several minutes, though, for the life of me, I couldn't see that any improvement was either needed or made.

I was the only looker-on that afternoon so the television screen was turned in my direction. I looked into it then at the young man, then back to the screen again. In the screen I saw quite a different person from the young man in front of the camera and under the lights. He still had the unruffled look and he was still purring out his lines softly, but the darkening effect of the screen had made a change in him. He had lost his fair and youthful look and appeared on the screen as a rather mature man with dark hair and a dark Ronald Colman moustache. I felt then that the answers to my questions were revealed completely and at once, but later this was proved incorrect. Certainly medium fair people looked dark on the screen, but not all people necessarily seemed older.

At about a quarter to three, the lights that blazed on the young an-

nouncer were turned off and he was allowed to relax for a while. This he did by walking about the studio still murmuring his already perfect opening lines. At the opposite end of the studio there was another blaze of lights and preparations were being made here for the "Training the Pup" programme. On a table sat the large pup Jasper, impatient for mischief while his master held him firmly by the collar. This pup was well known to viewers, because he had been brought in front of the television cameras ever since he was a few weeks old, and viewers had watched him grow up. At each appearance he had helped to show how a pup should be trained and treated from babyhood onwards. I thought the programme an excellent one because the interest and affection that viewers would get through seeing a pup week after week develop from puppyhood would enhance the lessons in training and care. In this programme viewers were to be shown how to treat an injured paw. At the same end of the studio everything was in readiness for the programme "About the Shops," and on one side the little demonstrating kitchen with its transparent oven was presided over by the demonstrator who was to give fifteen minutes cooking instruction.

Zero hour was almost at hand and the young announcer went again to his place in front of the huge camera and under the ring of lights. Tense silence, producers and technicians standing about, earphones adjusted. About one foot away from the announcer's face, one producer stood with arm held up and finger pointing as if waiting for a thunderbolt from heaven. However, all that happened was the slow deliberate chiming from Big Ben saying that it was three o'clock and time for the announcement that the television session,

"About the Home" was about to begin. Suddenly down came the arm with the pointing finger and in that split second out purred the much practised words of the good-looking announcer. I moved my eyes to the television screen in front of me and again I saw this older, darker man introducing the session. It was all over in about three seconds, and I wondered how on earth any viewer could have taken in his face, his words and also the angle of his collar-points and the hang of his tie.

The first fifteen minutes of the session was given to Jasper and his injured paw and there he sat in front of the camera and lights decked in an enormous white collar. The collar stood out for about 8 inches from his neck and was designed to prevent him from biting off the bandages from his injured paw—a thing which he would have greatly enjoyed doing, judging from his eagerness to be up to something all the time. His master was helped in the programme by a very popular television personality, Joan Gilbert. I was interested to meet her and see her in reality as well as on the screen, because she is one of the people on television who can really bring the screen to life. She is so natural and spontaneous that as soon as she comes into the picture, it picks up like a tonic. In her case the screen does not make her look any older, though it does make her fair hair seem dark.

The next programme was the cooking demonstration, and this was given by a woman from Lancashire. She was demonstrating the traditional Lancashire Eccles cakes, which are pastry flats filled with currants. This was a first appearance on television and it was easy in the studio to pick the little signs of nervousness. However, these seemed to be eliminated on the screen, and the performance looked efficient and successful. The Eccles cakes were made in front of the cameras and under the fierce lights, and the demonstrator had difficulty in keeping her pastry cool enough to manage without it sticking to the board and rolling pin. They were cooked in the glass oven that was originally made for Philip Harben, and so viewers could see them rising and browning through the glass. The end of the fifteen-minute programme came and Joan Gilbert stepped forward to round it off. As usual, she asked to taste the finished product, but unfortunately the currants inside were so hot that she burnt her mouth and had great difficulty in hiding her agony. Actually she should have been given one of the cold Eccles cakes that had been made in the rehearsal that morning, but one can't think of everything in front of the television cameras and under an array of fierce television lamps.

The last programme of the session was called "About the Shops," and this came as dangerously near to advertising as may be. Some material for circular skirts, a new type of baby's bath and some gay holiday cushions made of plastic were displayed and commented upon, but no mention of where they could be purchased was given. Actually the omission was rather maddening because once one's interest had been stimulated by the excellence of the goods displayed, one naturally wanted to be saved the bother of having to find out where they could be bought. But so far television in England has not succumbed to advertising, though the fact that it is a viewing medium as well as a listening one often leads to dangerous borders.