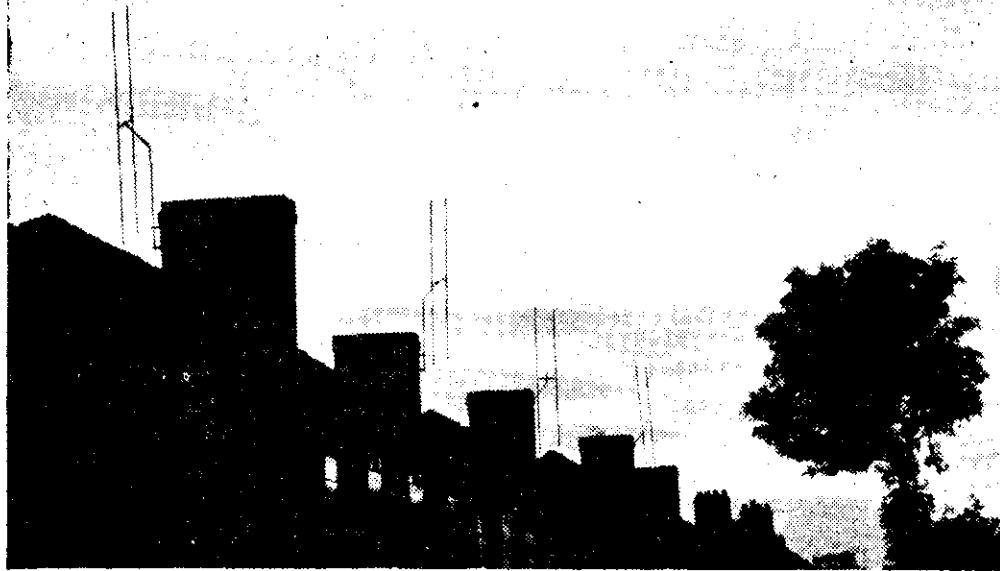


TV or Not TV—



—That is the question for British advertisers, says J. W. GOODWIN, whose impressions—airmailed from London—appear below.

IF it's a pub, I'll ask for mead and may at last find that time-mellowed drink, I promised myself. Certainly the black, rough-hewn beams and the uneven whitewashed plaster looked old enough to make my request appropriate, and as I quickened my pace round a bend in the Shropshire lane I saw through the trees the tiled roof lichened and bowed with age.

This was a scene to make a tourist all a-twitter, this was one of the sturdy hearts of England, with the solid virtues of its years—and of the Long Parliament, for the date over the door was 1640.

Then I spied it. If it had been the head of Cromwell himself, I could not have been more startled; at least, that on the gable would have been more suitable than the H television aerial. In a flash I was swept out of that isolated valley on the Welsh border, back to the busy world of buses and queues where people argue with some feeling about sponsored television, back to Westminster where the Government's proposals to allow advertising on the air have split both the Conservative and Labour parties as rarely before.

That is typical of the social revolution in Britain brought about in five years by some 2,000,000 TV sets.

In 1948 television was still something of a novelty restricted to London. It was still a "class" entertainment with 24 per cent of the sets owned by people earning more than £1000 a year and a similar percentage by people in the £650 to £1000 group.

The conspicuous aerial was almost an ostentatious sign that one had arrived socially. It might even have been suspected that those people who had formerly sported plus-fours to impress the neighbours (for here golf is still the sport for people who cannot afford to hunt but who cannot afford not to meet the people who do) sometimes owned no more than the aerial. Then a set was spoken of almost with awe, certainly with pride, and always as "tele-

vision." Now it is casually accepted as TV.

This was impressed on me when, after four years' absence, I returned to England and was seeking accommodation in an industrial city. I was told by landladies that "the house is equipped with all the usual amenities, including TV," or that "there's TV and radio, of course, and hot water."

I relished the "of course," and the afterthought about hot water in an area of dark satanic mills. The TV's turned on, God's in His heaven, and all's right with the world.

More Bottles

The social revolution which has increased the TV audience to equal the circulation of the *News of the World*—and it is a comparison not without significance—is to be seen in a variety of ways, some quite unexpected. For ex-

ample, when a new transmitter enslaves a new section of Britain, there is an immediate increased demand for screw-stoppered bottles. There may also be a drop in bus takings.

The explanation is that if a man is not to go to the pub at night, he will want to take his drink home with him, and if the family watch TV, they will not go by bus to the pictures.

According to the chairman of the BBC Governors, Sir Alexander Cadogan, expenditure on TV sets has adversely affected the sales of washing machines, refrigerators and other household "extras."

Less Time on Hobbies

A survey by the BBC audience research department shows that TV cuts the time spent on hobbies, visits to the public house, cinema going, radio listening, and reading. However, few gardeners allow it to distract them and outdoor games have not been much affected.

Somewhat different conclusions from these, based on the opinions of one viewer in 1000, were reached by a University of Birmingham survey of the effects on one in 15 adolescents at Coventry. One in every four boys and girls questioned had been induced by TV to patronise outdoor sport often, though they now stayed at home far more.

As for the effect on reading, public libraries and publishers report unexpected rises in book borrowing last year.

Adults spend between 10 and 11 hours a week looking-in. Most of those questioned do not think that children watch TV too much, though at 12 to 14 years old they average nearly six hours a week, and children of 15 even longer.

Half-Hour Dramas from the BBC

IT must have been quite a change for Sam Costa to make his entrance in a radio show without the famous "Was there something?" of *Much-Binding* days. But Sam has added straight actor to the two other callings—crooner and variety comedian—which made him famous. In *Who's Your Lady Friend?* a BBC mystery drama, he plays the lively detective-sergeant who has a hand in unmasking a murderer.

Written by Peter Fraser, *Who's Your Lady Friend?* is one of a BBC series entitled *Thirty-minute Theatre*, scheduled to begin soon from YA and Commercial stations. Originally broadcast in Britain's Home and Light programmes, the series covers the range of radio drama from macabre mystery to sentimental comedy. It should not be confused with the Australian series of the same name at present being heard from 2YC on Saturday afternoons.

Sam Costa is not the only well-known comedian to appear in the broadcasts. Wilfred Pickles plays the commercial traveller in *Autumn Holiday*, a comedy based on Chekhov's story *Lady with a*

Dog. With him will be Victoria Hopper as the little grass widow.

A radio doctor with an approach quite different from usual will also appear during the series. He is the medico of Alicia Ramsey and Rudolph de Cordova's Regency-period play *Dr. Abernethy*. Noted for the extreme bluntness of his bedside manner Dr. Abernethy kept the Prince of Wales waiting while he attended a non-paying patient, and later informed the First Gentleman of Europe that he was not a future king at all, but a mere "stomach." The good doctor had a theory that most diseases arose from over-eating (in that day of gargantuan meals he had good reason to think so), and as a result he prescribed for most of his patients a dry biscuit. The *Radio Times* describes *Dr. Abernethy* as "one of the best radio plays ever written,"



SAM COSTA

A touch of television now makes the whole world kin and a comment on last night's programme is as likely to open a conversation with a stranger as a remark about the weather—though the cynic might remark that even in England the weather cannot always be had. On the other hand, television is making people less sociable. Whereas one's friends used to come for a cosy fire-side chat, some now greet their hostess with: "What's on?" and then say nothing more till a couple of hours later: "Not so bad. Good night."

Question on what they were doing between 8.30 and 9.0 p.m., the peak viewing time, 61 per cent of several thousand people were looking-in, seven per cent had gone to bed, six per cent were listening to the radio, and 20 per cent were out. In a similar number of homes without television, 31 per cent were listening-in, 26 per cent were indoors doing something else, 11 per cent had gone to bed, and 32 per cent were out.

To some extent TV is still a "class" entertainment, but it is a very different class. The percentage of viewers with incomes above £1000 has dwindled in four years by a third to nine per cent. More than half TV owners now earn less than £8 a week.

The warning of the Severidge Commission that commercial radio would lead to a lowering of standards makes it significant that seven out of 10 of the adults who spend most time viewing left school at 14 or 15. Given two families with different levels of education but similar incomes, it is the family with the lower education which gets a TV set first, say the BBC researchers.

Ten years of public opinion sampling shows that the BBC has never stood higher in public estimation and now three out of five people prefer the control of TV programmes to be left as it is. On none of the five occasions since 1943 that the question has been asked in a Gallup poll have more than two out of five favoured commercial radio. Last year, the women, at whom most of the advertising would be directed, were decidedly against it.

Whoever controls the programmes, television can be too attractive. This survey would have been written last night if it had not been for two hours looking-in at Lords and Wimbledon.

and recalls that after a pre-war broadcast in America the co-author received letters addressed to "Dr. Abernethy, C/o Rudolph de Cordova."

Other broadcasts in *Thirty-minute Theatre* include: *Summer Rain*, the Quinteros's little lightweight drama about a crotchety old couple on a park bench who rediscover a 50-year-old romance; *The Private View*, Stefan Zweig's moving story of a blind art-lover whose prints are sold to ward off poverty and replaced by blank sheets of paper; *Fame Without Spur*, Frank Weston's comic portrayal of a Royal Academician's unconventional rise to fame; *Mr. X*, the tale of the remarkable change in mousey little George Tapping which was brought about when the mysterious Mr. X came into his life; and *There's An Alligator on the Landing*, Ross Cockrill's queer story of an elderly sinner with a disconcerting knowledge of Voodoo.

Thirty-minute Theatre starts from 2ZA at 7.45 p.m. this Sunday, July 26, and from all YA stations at 8.30 p.m. on Saturday, August 29. It is scheduled to begin from 4ZB on September 13, 3ZB on September 27, 2ZB on October 18, and 1ZB on November 22.

N.Z. LISTENER, JULY 24, 1953.