

What Broadcasting should do for Religion

In this article Dr. Archibald Fleming considers the possible influence of broadcasting upon the future of religion—and in particular the tremendous responsibility of the religious broadcaster.

I AM asked to say what, as it appears to me, broadcasting should do for religion. I confess to a first inclination to suggest that perhaps the shoe might be put on the other foot—that one might inquire what religion can do for broadcasting. Had this been the question, the immediate answer would have been: See what it has done already. It is not too much to say that it is largely because the spirit of religion in the widest sense has inspired and permeated the policy of the B.B.C. from the beginning that it has become, by common acknowledgement, the finest broadcasting system in the world. An always cheerful, yet steadily maintained idealism in everything—not merely in spheres theological and ethical, but in the educational, aesthetic and recreative departments as well—has given British broadcasting that unique tone and character of which all of us are so justly proud.

So much for what religion has done for broadcasting. But—"What should

broadcasting do for religion?" Perhaps I have been asked to attempt to answer this question because every year, since the beginning of broadcasting in this country (save in 1927, when I was ill), I have been allowed to give the midnight New Year message to the listeners at all the stations. And those who broadcast are the recipients of verbal and epistolary messages after their work is done which enable them to judge of its effect. It is my experience—and it is vastly supplemented by what I hear on all sides regarding the weekly or incidental religious services, the wonderful 10.30 p.m. Sunday "Epilogue," and the (too little known) 10.15 a.m. short daily service—that an untold number of listeners, and these of an infinite variety, derive benefit from those services, whether formal or informal, for which they hasten to express the most encouraging gratitude.

There was a grotesque fear at one time harboured that broadcast services

would empty the churches. The opposite has been the case; by vastly widening the appeal of religion, and often re-awakening long-dormant religious instincts, they have helped to refill the churches, and to nourish the already reviving interest in things appertaining to religion. There was, again, an equally unfounded apprehension that listeners might resent the obtrusion of religious subjects upon them. On the contrary, opposition has been still; and vast, unsuspected multitudes have shown that broadcasting is giving them that for which they had thirsted for long.

God only knows how many broken lives and hearts have been cheered and mended; how many half-made good resolves have been confirmed; into how many monotonous or sordid bread-earning jobs a glimpse of idealism, and the inspiration to raise higher the standard of duty and integrity, have been introduced; how many lonely beds of pain and how much weariness in outposts of isolation have been made less intolerable by the hearing of confident messages of patience and courage, of hope for this life and the life to come; how many pure and hallowed associations of earlier, better days have been revived—by the quiet, pervasive, vitalising power of unaffected, earnest utterances of religious import, sent forth, not without a prayer, from studio or pulpit.

So broadcasting has done much for religion. But it might do more. Some of those who are asked to use it for religious ends are not, perhaps, quite successful in visualising the vast audiences they address. They sometimes speak to them as if they were mainly made up of habitual churchgoers. They are not. They approach them as if they were versed in the jargon of theology, and familiar with the sequences of public worship. They are not. They address them as though they were academic intraining, deeply and widely read, interested in the controversies of the schools. In most cases, they are not. The vast majority are intelligent, but busy and often simple folk; working with their hands, or deep in the routine of shop or office.

Yes: but they have all within them the "human heart by which we live"; the spirit hunger from which all of us suffer; the frailties common to us all and the regrets or troubles so often consequent upon these frailties and downfalls. They all know what temptation is, what frustration is, and hope deferred. And they all have a longing, faint or strong, for some contact with the Unseen—though, perhaps only, at the moment, for the "touch of a vanished hand, and the sound of a voice that is still." It is to that universal cry—pathetic, heroic, or perhaps only commonplace—that the broadcaster must answer. Virtue must go out from him, as from heart to heart, mind to mind, soul to soul. Nothing that counts him nothing will be worth more than nothing. He must not preach, still less must he pray, at his unseen hearers. His pulse must—beat for beat—respond to theirs. If it does so, he will find that he has commended the "Love divine, all loves excelling," to the invisible multitude; for he will have communicated somehow his love and sympathy to them. And this Bread which he breaks for them will be no whit less than sacramental. For it will show forth his Lord's love to them till He come.

A New Chum's Complaint

IT is interesting to note the satisfactory increase in the licenses being taken out, and this naturally means that literally thousands of people in this country are "new chums" so far as wireless is concerned. I am one whose interest was sufficiently aroused at the time of the Southern Cross flight to urge me to invest in a six-valve set, but, like hundreds of other listeners, I wish to know something of the machine and "how it works." Thinking to be able to pick up something from current literature on radio, I find, almost without exception, that the newcomer is not catered for, and under the circumstances I consider you would be conferring a great boon to us newcomers if some simple, non-technical explanation were published occasionally of the various terms used in radio. For instance, grid leak, radio frequency, choke, condensers, parallel feed, plate, etc., etc., are all so much double Dutch to hundreds of new chums to wireless broadcasting, and I feel you would be filling a long-felt want if short articles were published each week in explanation of the various terms used, which would encourage those with the time and inclination to tackle building their own sets. Radio is by no means a simple subject to "get the hang of," but there does not appear to be any attempt to educate the vast number of listeners, many of whom, I feel sure, want to feel in a position to know something about the complicated machine that modern science has given them.

Hearty congratulations are due to the R.B.C. for the very interesting relay of the armistice service from 5SW. —New Chum.

[Every effort is made by us to cater for the newcomer, and with that object in view we published a few months back the "New Zealand Radio Listeners' Guide" (price 2s. 6d. or 2s. 9d. post-ed), covering, in 160 pages, practically all the information that should be available to a newcomer. This publication included a complete glossary of wireless terms. In response to requests for the very need you have mentioned, we republished the whole of that glossary throughout the "Radio Record." This has just been concluded, which possibly accounts for your not having noticed it in the "Radio Record." This edition of the "Guide" is practically exhausted, but it will be republished, with the necessary additions to bring it up to date, early in the New Year.

As a further effort to meet the requirements of the "new chum" in radio, we conduct weekly in the "Radio Record" a Beginners' Corner, where queries are invited to be submitted, and are dealt with in return. Our Constructional section is also designed to help those who wish to make their own sets. We quite appreciate the problem of the "new chum," and as far as possible we are catering for it along these lines. You will understand, however, that with a continued supply of newcomers entering the ranks of radio, it is impossible to keep repeating all the essential matter that it is necessary for the newcomer to absorb. The ground, however, is covered as well as possible.—Ed.]

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