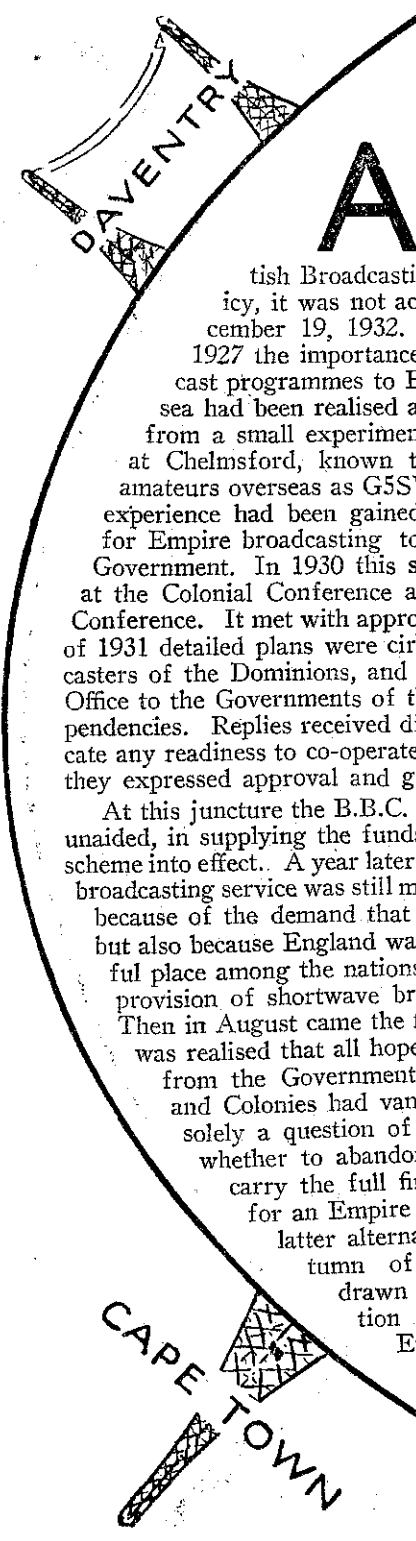


BROADCASTING



ALTHOUGH Empire broadcasting is to-day an established and growing feature of the British Broadcasting Corporation's policy, it was not actually started till December 19, 1932. But as far back as 1927 the importance of supplying broadcast programmes to British residents overseas had been realised and tests were started from a small experimental shortwave station at Chelmsford, known to enthusiastic radio amateurs overseas as G5SW. By 1929 sufficient experience had been gained to enable a scheme for Empire broadcasting to be laid before the Government. In 1930 this scheme was discussed at the Colonial Conference and at the Imperial Conference. It met with approval, and in the spring of 1931 detailed plans were circulated to the broadcasters of the Dominions, and through the Colonial Office to the Governments of the Colonies and Dependencies. Replies received did not, however, indicate any readiness to co-operate practically, although they expressed approval and goodwill.

At this juncture the B.B.C. did not feel justified, unaided, in supplying the funds necessary to put its scheme into effect. A year later the need for a British broadcasting service was still more pressing, not only because of the demand that was known to exist, but also because England was not taking its rightful place among the nations of the world in the provision of shortwave broadcasting facilities. Then in August came the financial crisis, and it was realised that all hope of financial support from the Government or the Dominions and Colonies had vanished, and it became solely a question of the B.B.C. deciding whether to abandon the project, or to carry the full financial responsibility for an Empire Service. It chose the latter alternative, and in the autumn of 1931 plans were drawn up for the construction of an up-to-date Empire broadcasting station at Daventry which would transmit pro-

grammes in approximately a year's time. A great deal had been learnt during the five years of transmissions from G5SW, but much experimental work remained to be done, and it was decided in these early days, to transmit only very simple programmes, principally gramophone records, relays from the home programmes and, as a main feature, a news bulletin in each transmission. When the service opened, the daily programme schedule consisted of five two-hour broadcasts radiated from the Empire station at Daventry at convenient listening times for the five main divisions into which, for broadcasting purposes, the Empire had been divided. Roughly speaking these were: (1) Australia, New Zealand, British North Borneo and the Pacific Islands; (2) India, Burma, Ceylon, the Malay States and the Straits Settlements; (3) South Africa, East Africa, Aden, Malta, Cyprus, and Palestine; (4) West Africa, Ascension Islands, St. Helena and the Falkland Islands; (5) Canada, British Guiana, British Honduras, the West Indies and Newfoundland.

The development of the programmes inevitably depended upon the response, received in the form of letters, from individual listeners overseas and the co-operation of such broadcasting organisations as existed in the Dominions and Colonies. Preliminary publicity had stressed the importance of this assistance. The distant listener alone could supply the knowledge on which future programme plans and technical adjustments would be based. The invaluable assistance provided by the listening end has been largely responsible for the success of this new broadcasting venture, and the considerable developments which have been possible during the two years of its existence. There is no doubt that the interest of listeners throughout the world was greatly stimulated by the Empire Christmas Day programme of 1932, and particularly by the message from the King with which that programme concluded. This programme, which would never have been possible without the collaboration of overseas broadcasting organisations, aroused great expectations. Hundreds of listeners wrote letters, not only appreciative of it, but also giving their views on the form which the daily Empire programmes should take. Much valuable information was received, and with it the knowledge that there existed in all quarters a nucleus of listeners, whose enthusiasm was a sure sign that the popularity of the new service would spread rapidly.

The whole financial responsibility for the Empire service was being shouldered by the B.B.C., and, without positive proof of the existence of an overseas audience, the expenditure on programmes had to be kept to a minimum. But by April, 1933, there was no doubt as to the widespread appreciation of the Empire transmissions, and there