

TO THE EMPIRE

was then every reason to apply a modest weekly sum towards the improvement of the programme service. If it could give pleasure to friends or relatives living in places where entertainment was not easily obtainable there could be no license-holder in the United Kingdom who would resent the allocation of an infinitesimal fraction of his annual ten shillings payment to this end. By July of last year the Empire programmes had been strengthened, the timings adjusted, the total hours of broadcasting increased from 10 to 14½. Technical alterations were also undertaken designed to enable large numbers of people to hear more transmissions than the one primarily designed for them.

Just what that first Christmas Day broadcast in 1932 meant to British people exiled from England at that time of the year is told in the following letter received by the B.B.C. from an Englishman living in the Federated Malay States:—

"We live in a small out-station, and have no wireless, but a friend who was coming to stay with us suggested bringing his set. He arrived on Christmas Eve and we set a 20 foot bamboo pole in the ground for an aerial. In view of the fact that we are surrounded by a positive forest of casuarina trees of 60 to 80 feet in height and that the aerial was, of necessity, a Heath Robinson contraption as well as being very low, our friend was far from optimistic about the result. . . . We sat out on the lawn with the sea only a few feet away. The garden was alight with fireflies, and on the tops of the casuarinas the Southern Cross rested on its side. At nine o'clock by our time the programme began. Of the thrill it gave us it is quite impossible to write. The magnitude of what was happening was beyond realisation. . . . We were all people who have been through a variety and number of experiences and have become normally hardened in the process, but to hear the King speak as if he were actually standing beside us here in our tropical garden, and to feel that his voice was being heard by all his peoples all over the world was an experience which, I think, has worked a perceptible, if subtle change in all of us. . . . After the National Anthem we went into our Christmas dinner; with the candle-lit tree, turkey, plum pudding and the carols coming to us through the open windows from the wireless outside, it was not too difficult to imagine that we were actually in England instead of 10,000 miles away. There must be hundreds, millions, just like us, and it must have been brought home to them, as it was to us, that we are all banded together, however many thousands of miles we may be apart, in loyalty to, and faith in our King."

Although there is good reason to be satisfied with the results achieved up to date, there are still parts of the Empire, notably New Zealand, where matters are by no means satisfactory. Conditions are rarely consistent and reception varies from place to place and from season to season, but continual experiments are being made at the transmitting end, and reports from the difficult areas show that reception is definitely better than it was a year ago. Even now many listeners write enthusiastically from all over the Empire to the B.B.C. stating that reception is sometimes so good that Empire programmes are as

clear as those transmitted from their local stations.

During the latter part of 1933 and the first half of the present year there has been an increasing tendency on the part of broadcasting organisations overseas to relay the programmes transmitted from the Empire station, and it is anticipated that this practice will grow. The primary object of the Empire service, and one which will never be overlooked, is to keep those who are out of range of any local broadcasting station (particularly dwellers in the Colonies and Dependencies) in touch with the home country. Valuable assistance has recently been given by certain Colonial Administrations, which have set up wireless exchanges through which the Empire programmes are being rediffused in urban centres. Apart from individual offers of financial support there has been recognition in some Colonies of the desirability, where possible, of contributing to the Empire service. But before any general contribution from overseas towards Empire broadcasting can be expected the B.B.C. feels it must demonstrate that the shortwave service, which is already successful in many places, is practicable everywhere. This can only be done gradually, since development towards technical perfection must necessarily be slow if it is to be sure. Yet the fact that what has already been done has been sufficiently appreciated in certain quarters to result in the offer of financial assistance reinforces the B.B.C. in its decision to pursue steadily its forward policy.

When looking to the future there are two further points which merit attention. First, there are a great many British residents in the South American Continent who, not without reason, feel that their interests should be considered. But the Empire had to be a first charge in the scheme for British shortwave broadcasting, and technical limitations have to some degree prevented inclusion within the transmission area of certain important tracts of country inhabited by British subjects. Here programmes are
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VANCOUVER

WELLINGTON