

# Italian Radio Used to Spread Atmosphere of Fascism

Last week there was published on this page an article dealing with broadcasting in Italy, written for "The Observer" (London) by Hilda Matheson. Below is printed another article by Miss Matheson, dealing this time with programmes and audiences.

THE slogan of Italian "Radio Rurale," printed on every publication, is a phrase of the Duce's—"il villaggio deve avere la radio." This pronouncement occurred in an article in the "Popolo d'Italia," in 1933, which launched the idea of a special organisation to counteract the concentration of listening round the large towns.

The avowed objective is to encourage an anti-urban outlook, and to spread the psychological atmosphere of Fascism. Broadcasts to schools and village audiences alike are all designed to foster the characteristics of the Fascist spirit: personal admiration of and devotion to the Duce, a sense of national glory and national tradition, love of the soil, zeal for physical fitness, exaltation of military valour and military discipline, respect for established religion and authority. In this sense every programme is propagandist. But, since all broadcasting may be regarded as a means of "putting across" an idea or a personality, a point of view or an experience, a system like Radio Rurale, in which the art of "putting across" is of prime importance, provides a useful field of study for all broadcasters.

Broadcasts to schools were started in March, 1933, and to peasant audiences in the following month. School programmes are given for a half-hour period three times a week during school hours, on Mondays, Wednesdays and Saturdays. The authorities decided that in order to avoid antagonising the teaching profession the ordinary curriculum should be strictly avoided. In England (more constructively, it should be noted) programmes are planned jointly by teachers and broadcast officials in direct relation to lessons, though in no sense trespassing upon them. Radio Rurale concentrates upon providing those contacts with the larger world which are beyond the reach of mountain villages, whose children, at least, have never seen a train. Here is a random list of these actuality programmes: A commentator with a travelling microphone visits the army manoeuvres, the launch of a ship, a submarine flotilla, a group of the Balilla learning military drill, the training of naval Fascist scouts, a land-reclamation colony in Littoria, a railway signal-box, the central post-office. There are dramatised tours of the chief cities of Italy, often with relays of characteristic sounds. There are visits to historical sites, mostly cast in dialogue between a grown-up and one or more children. There are stories, usually in "radio-scena" form, of heroes and martyrs and national figures, and dramatisations corresponding to the English "Dramatic Interludes," of historical incidents.

Direct instruction is given in three subjects for which the village teacher is usually unequipped—music, drawing, and drill. Music teaching follows much the same lines as in other countries—the notes of the scale, the values of different notes, rhythm, choral singing—but with special emphasis on correct voice production in singing. Drawing seems to have more value as a game than as a lesson; it consists in the plotting of points on squared paper, which, when joined by the child, form the outline of a house, a church, etc., in which details are added later at each child's pleasure. Physical exercises, worked out by the Fascist academy, and

including simple drill and marching, are taught with the aid of a demonstration class. To these must be added a monthly calendar of events, a semi-dramatised commentary on current activities, in which a small boy interrogates a voice impersonating the month. These interviews may include M. Laval's visit to Rome, an incident in Somaliland, or a party celebration.

The service for adults is at present more limited. It consists of an hour on Sunday mornings, between 10 and 11, when peasants from scattered holdings may be collected in the village after mass. The programme is in three parts: fifteen minutes' comment on current affairs, including explanation of price movements affecting the peasant as producer or consumer; twenty minutes of popular music and songs; and twenty-five minutes in which each of the ten stations supplies agricultural advice related to local crops and problems, explains new regulations and answers questions of general interest raised in correspondence. Room is occasionally found for advice to women on child welfare and household management.

The directors of Radio Rurale have understood that broadcasting does not begin or end with the microphone. A network of personal contacts is maintained, through civic and party officials, village priests and mayors, teachers and inspectors. Correspondence is encouraged, queries are answered by post, and prizes are given for good letters. Judging from examples given, "good" is apt to be interpreted as equivalent to "lyrically grateful." A monthly illustrated journal of sixteen pages is distributed free to the extent of 150,000 copies. This gives simple advice on the use and care of wireless sets, advance notes on programmes to enable teachers and group leaders to prepare themselves beforehand, and general supplementary material in connection with music lessons, drill and drawing.

It is idle to deny that Radio Rurale is primarily propaganda. Photographs of the Duce, laughing, patting a child's head, working as a harvester in the newly reclaimed province, marching on Rome or filling one or other of his many roles, adorn every issue of the journal. The secretary of the party is president of the organisation; ardent Fascist patriotism breathes in every broadcast; the whole scheme is knit up with maintaining a party ascendancy. Yet the fact remains that the mere existence of a special unit for a special purpose throws light upon its problems and infuses energy and enthusiasm into its study. In every country the peculiar service which broadcasting can render is to the more remote and backward sections of the population. The B.B.C. has tended to be urban and metropolitan in outlook. With certain admirable exceptions, such as farming and gardening talks, and several schools series, the country has been regarded mainly as something into which enterprising young men could, like so many Jack Horners, put in a thumb and pull out a plum, in the form of a picturesque countryman, preferably with dialect, or a quaintly surviving ceremony. Yet there is a rural, as distinct from a city, point of view. If agriculture is to be revived in this country, and possibilities of land settlement explored, something on a different and a larger scale will be needed.