

THE KING LISTENS-IN



"I thank God for wireless," the King once told a Cabinet Minister. This article is an intimate sketch of His Majesty as a listener-in, written by a member of the Royal Household, an aunt of Princess Mary and the Earl of Harewood.

(By the Hon. Mrs. Frances Lascelles in the "Wireless Weekly.")

THE King is now in his seventieth year, but unlike many people of his age, he keeps up with the times and takes the greatest interest in new inventions and discoveries. When broadcasting became a practical proposition about twelve years ago, the King was one of the first in the country to have a wireless set installed. Like thousands of his subjects in those early experimental days, he found the problem of obtaining satisfactory reception one that passed baffling, if interesting, hours!

His Majesty once told a wireless engineer at a radio exhibition that the manipulation of his first wireless set caused him more trouble than the navigation of his yacht! The King has always at his disposal the finest wireless experts in London to adjust his sets when necessary, but in the pioneer days of radio his Majesty always liked to experiment himself.

Nowadays, the King possesses in each of his residences one of the very latest wireless installations—and he has no trouble at all in "tuning in" when he wishes. The makers of the sets chosen by the King—and he chooses them all personally—are kept a close secret, in conformity with the rigid rule that the purchases of the Royal Family must never be made a matter for public advertising. It can be said, however, that his Majesty does not confine himself to one kind of set.

IT is while at his Norfolk residence and at Balmoral Castle, Scotland, that the King enjoys listening-in most, for in both these places he has more spare time than in London or Windsor. Windsor Castle was the last Royal residence to be equipped with a wireless set—and even to-day the King and Royal family find it a little hard to get accustomed to hearing the latest dance-music in the great historic apartments of the ancient and splendid home of English kings. The feudal air of Windsor refuses to be dispelled by "hot air" from the radio!

It is at Buckingham Palace that the King is always busiest, but, nevertheless, seldom a day passes without his Majesty "listening-in" for at least an hour. When in London, his Majesty prefers light music to plays or talks on the radio, but at Sandringham and Balmoral it is the reverse. The King once told a Labour Cabinet Minister that he heard so much talk every day in Buckingham Palace, at audiences, presentations and official luncheons, that he relished radio music in the evening.

His Majesty is a very conscientious listener; he simply cannot converse when anything good is on the air. During light music, of course, the position is different, and the King himself likes to control the volume of sound, so that the music and conversation will not clash unduly.

The King prefers to sit with his back to the receiving set—and this is the arrangement made in all his residences. His Majesty prefers British programmes to the foreign, and very seldom does he switch over to the Continent, unless there is something there which particularly appeals to him.

The King is a fluent French and German speaker, and he also has a good understanding of Russian, Spanish and Italian—and so foreign programmes present few difficulties to his Majesty. He frankly prefers home programmes, however, and it is interesting to note that he "tunes in" regularly to all the Regional Stations. From these he learns a great deal of what is happening locally all over the country. This is particularly pleasing to him, for the King has no "London complex," and looks on the country as a whole. When he is at Holyrood or Balmoral, his Majesty follows the Scottish programmes entirely.



Attendance at the theatre meant the customary fuss and trouble. . . .

HIS experiences at the microphone have increased, if anything, the King's interest in "listening-in," and he does not hide his pleasure at the fact that the B.B.C. considers his one of the best radio voices in Great Britain.

It is not generally realised what a special boon wireless is to Royalty. Before its advent, Royal personages could only hear music, speeches and accounts of everyday things after enduring wearisome formality and ceremony. If a British monarch wished to hear opera, attendance at the theatre was imperative, and this meant the customary fuss and trouble. Nowadays, King George V can hear almost anything he wishes at his own fireside. Without strain or search he has his hand, as it were, on the pulse of the nation. By the turning of a knob he can learn about all the lives, likings and ways of his millions of subjects—and through this knowledge he comes in closer contact and understanding with his people.

"I thank God for wireless," his Majesty once told a certain Cabinet Minister—and the King spoke from his heart. The overwhelming love and affection which he enjoys to-day from the country is due in no small measure to the radio.