

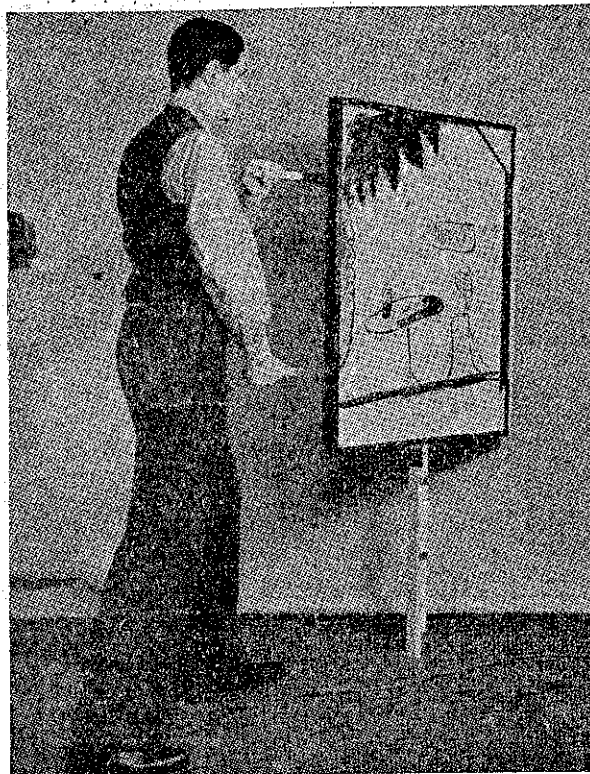
First English TELEVISION DRAMA

is a
LANDMARK in
BROADCAST
ENTERTAINMENT

WHEN I think how one used to go along a dusty road on a motor cycle in 1912 and '13, to a field, and there stand with a group of oddly-assorted, rather unplaceable people, I am forcibly made to compare it in my mind with what happened on the afternoon of July 14, 1930. The field, all those years ago, was just rough grass, and on one side of it a small and rather insecure-looking tarpaulin had been rigged up. We enthusiasts talked among ourselves, and flicked cigarette ash about. Every now and then someone held up a handkerchief to judge the strength and direction of the breeze.

Soon a flap was drawn up from the side of the tarpaulin, and out came three or four men, laboriously wheeling something that looked like a gigantic daddy-longlegs, with translucent wings spread out. We gathered round, examining the thin fabric of which it was made, and commenting eagerly upon the cunning way in which the piano wire was twisted about the bottoms and tops of the struts. We nodded sagely over the bicycle wheels underneath, and gingerly felt the edge of the propellor.

"Contact!" said the pilot, grasping the little joy-stick, and thrusting his elevator backwards and forwards. We noted how he tested also the ailerons. He adjusted his golf cap on back to front and, fixing his cigarette firmly to his upper lip, prepared for the jerk.



Success . . .

This is the story of the broadcasting of the first television play, under the direction of Mr. Lance Sieveking, who here relates his impressions. The play, "The Man with the Flower in his Mouth," went on the air from the Baird Studio, London, on July 14, 1930. It is an achievement which will be remembered in the history of television, as will the first radio broadcast of 1921. In ten years it will be interesting to compare this effort with the broadcast of the day. Television is now as much a rival to ordinary broadcasting as broadcasting was to other means of entertainment in 1921.

The scenes or objects were painted on mill-board and slid in and out at the side of the frame farthest from the handles. Television transmission will permit designs of only the boldest and simplest forms. The scribble on this frame was hastily dabbed on by Mr. Sieveking as an indication. Two of the proper scenes are pictured below.

The engine started. The men at the wing tips let go, and away it went, bumpy-bumpy-bump, across the field. We held our breath. It rose, it undoubtedly rose. Now it was down again. Again it rose. Up, up, ten feet, fifteen feet. It sank abruptly. It was approaching a tree. We held our breath. It sank beyond the tree. We turned to each other. Someone began to run, and then we were all running.

The 14th of July is celebrated in France in connection with a revolution. The 14th of July, 1930, had its revolution too, and I wonder how many people who stood and looked at that flickering picture, and heard those voices which now boomed, now scraped, now rattled, realised just the import, the significance, of the thing they were witnessing. There was just a group of them, all sorts of people. Some sat in rooms, and were shown the first play produced by television by means of the little commercial sets which Baird Television, Ltd., have put on the market. Others, a few friends of mine, and some more who were interested, just in the same way as those men were interested in the early flying machine, came up in a great open lift on to the windy roof of the Baird building. Here had been erected a long tunnel made of tarpaulin. We scrambled inside, and stood about a little awkwardly. The late-comers flashed into our darkness from the blinding sunlight outside. The wind blew, the tarpaulin rattled, shafts of sunlight shot across our vision.

AND then, on a cue given by telephone to Savoy Hill, the first television play began. From first to last the audience never stirred or made a sound. I think there was something in all their minds, which gave them the ability to see beyond that which their physical eyes and ears were receiving, something which does come upon groups of people sometimes, and which is called prophetic. At the end of the long tunnel, where it narrowed, a big screen leaped into life. It had only been tried a few times before, and we none of us quite knew what to expect. But it held from first to last that oddly-assorted audience, standing or crouching as best they could, and certainly it was not only the work of Pirandello, nor the acting—though it was very good acting—of the cast, nor the production which had unified all the little bits of the play—which held them. No, it was something more. . . .

The problem to be faced in setting out to produce a play within the mechanical limitations at present imposed was a problem which needed all the patience and ingenuity

