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The uses of the Cinema and Radio for Empire
Education and trade

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A discussion of these two items which must be reckoned into the medley comprising modern life, could not fail to take into account some aspects of their peculiar universality. It has been said that the Motion Picture is at once the story book, newspaper, and text-book of the 20th Century, and whether this be strictly true or exaggerated, there is no doubt about the enormous influence which both the cinema and the radio exercise over our lives. They are, therefore, of enormous importance for the Empire, for just as that is for flung over all the world, so do they extend their influence into every corner of the globe. Both are international, which is a very important consideration for the Empire, which embraces so many different races, and so many varied types of people.

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The film, especially, is a "universal language," since it appeals to passions and ideas, such as love, hate, avarice, humour, which are present in all peoples. Sometimes, however, we have to be careful in showing films to peoples whom they do not directly concern; eg the American Civil War film "The Birth of a Nation", although it was naturally loudly acclaimed in the United States, yet created racial enmities, and even bloodshed elsewhere. But the film always can, and, for the above reason sometimes must, appeal to all classes, races, and creeds, and offend none.

In the sphere of education, the film can advance its claims in several ways. First of all, the education of children in schools is being more and more facilitated by the introduction of school cinemas. It is claimed

that 90% of our knowledge is obtained visually, but the film must nevertheless only be a supplement to the knowledge gained from other sources, and an aid in gaining that knowledge. One great advantage which the cinema offers over other forms of education is that, since the room is darkened, the pupils' attention is kept on the screen, and so does not wander from the subject. Educationalists say that the film is best for teaching history, and both natural and agricultural science, while Mr Edison, the inventor of the Kinetoscope, maintained that it would ultimately displace all other methods in the school-room for teaching geography. All these subjects have an important bearing on the Empire, and if the children learn of the founders and maintainers of our Empire, of the countries which comprise the great commonwealth of nations, and of life and work in them, then the citizens of to-morrow will know more about our Empire and its problems, and be better fitted to discuss and to judge.

Turning to adult education by means of the cinema, the ordinary picture play, even if it only gives occasional scenes of life in the Colonies, helps to give the picture an atmosphere, and shows the audience, something, at least, of that particular outpost of Empire. More important, and more useful, are the nature films, like "Africa Speaks" and "Trader Horn", where the whole purpose of the film is to present life actually as it is lived, in other parts of the Empire than our own, and to use as actors, the untrained natives, living as they would at any other time - in fact, the only story in the film need be the lives of the natives, as in the epic "Nanook of the North", in which the plot was the life of an Eskimo, and nothing ^{more}. The recently filmed "Man of Aran" falls under this category. Films like these help us to understand, more than any book or lecture could, how others who recognise King George as

their sovereign actually live — they give us a sense of brotherhood with all the peoples of the Empire; they stimulate "Empire-consciousness".

The News-Reels have somewhat the same effect. By means of these, too, the peoples of the Empire are drawn closer together. For example, suppose Mr Bennett, the Canadian Premier, attends an important function, he would probably be seen throughout all the colonies, as well as in Great Britain, through the agency of the news-reel, which helps to lift our thoughts over the small boundaries of our individual countries, and to let us think more widely with our other colleagues of the Empire. The King would be seen in all the colonies — he therefore becomes the embodiment of our unity, as it is obvious that he does when he broadcasts to all his people on Christmas Day each year.

The universality of the cinema, when applied to trade purposes, produces some amazing results. To quote a rather humorous example: — A national convention of the United States plumbing industry recently passed a resolution thanking the cinema industry for spreading, by its representation of bathroom fittings, a world-wide demand for American plumbing! Although we do not expect such spectacular results to be forthcoming outside the United States, yet all the ~~off~~ aspects of the cinema considered above do help Imperial trade in a great measure. We see, especially in the news-reels, the natural resources and products of our colonies, while the Colonial cinemagoer sees our natural resources and manufactures. In spite of this, however, I think that there is room for more films dealing with the lives of representative citizens of the Empire, not necessarily half-civilised, as in "Africa Speaks", but of skilled civilised people like ourselves, eg. a Canadian lumberjack, a South African gold miner, or an Australian sheep-farmer.

Such films would undoubtedly create greater interest in, and demand for, Empire goods, than exists at present.

Then there are the films which the general public does not see. A film may be made by a certain manufacturing firm, and shown only to interested audiences outside the cinemas. eg. Both Austin Motors Ltd, and Morris Motors Ltd, periodically make a film each, advertising their products. These films are distributed to certain large garages, in important centres both in Gt. Britain and the Empire, and only motorists are admitted by special invitation. Films may also be made by a municipality, and distributed to prospective markets, there to be seen by the business men of the centre. eg. the film recently made by the Port of Bristol Authority, entitled "The Port of Bristol," was shown to business men in all the Bristols of the United States, and met with an encouraging response. The principle might with even greater success be applied within the Empire, and there is no doubt that if, guided by the success of past efforts, their sponsors will make and distribute more of these films in the future, inter-Imperial trade will be decidedly strengthened.

We must not forget the beneficial influence which films intended specially for the farmer have upon trade. The United States Department of Agriculture seems to be especially alive to this use of the cinema. The farmer, even in isolated country districts (for he is reached by a travelling cinema van), can be instructed by this means to avoid and help to extinguish forest fires, to increase the yield of his land, to protect his crops and cattle from disease and parasites, to build roads, and much other useful work. This system is of inestimable value wherever it is used, and it should prove, if applied to the needs of the Empire, of great

assistance to farmers, who have everywhere fallen on bad times.

Broadcasting is, perhaps, even more universal in its appeal than the cinema, for every family possessing a wireless set can listen to it at any time, whereas one has to go out to a cinema to see films, and often there is neither the inclination nor the money to do so. Of course, the radio, too, costs money, but in that case we do not see our money paid for that particular entertainment - it all goes towards the periodical payments to the Corporation Electricity Department or to the battery charger, and accordingly we do not stint individual programmes because we do not know their cost. Again, broadcasting overcomes the time and place difficulty which must necessarily exist with the cinema. A radio message may circle the world in a fraction of a second; - assuming that there are no hindrances and delays, a film taken in England needs at least $3\frac{1}{2}$ to 4 hours to develop and print, then even if it travels by Scott and Black's record-breaking 'Comet' plane, it cannot accomplish the 15,000 miles journey to Australia in less than 3 days. What a difference from the radio! In a broadcast of a topical event, we actually "live" the occasion with the participants - when we see a news-reel, we only witness the event. Thus I think that broadcasting is of even greater importance for the Empire than the cinema, since it comes within the reach of so many more people, is with them more often, and by its instantaneous nature does more to strengthen our ties of unity and comradeship, than the latter.

It is convenient to divide up the spheres of influence of the radio into four or five channels. Broadly speaking, broadcast programmes consist of news, talks, plays and readings from literature, music, and light entertainment. This summary leaves out

of account broadcasts of topical events, sport, and other national and international functions.

Let us take each of these activities separately, and consider what advantages they offer the Empire, especially as regards education and trade.

That speed is where the radio scores over other forms of distributing news cannot be denied. Speed is essential in the distribution of news — for news to be at all effective, it must be given to the public while their enthusiasm and interest is at its height, and before other things have distracted their minds. By relaying the actual event, or a description of it, radio is in advance of all newspapers. Furthermore, radio news, unlike that of most modern newspapers, is concise, and unbiased — at least as far as politics is concerned. Most people want to know "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth", and the radio gives it to them. Empire news given in this way has an added interest, especially when it is supplemented by intelligent talks given by competent speakers — such a series of talks, entitled "Current Imperial Affairs" has been recently inaugurated. It can scarcely be doubted that the outlook of the average Englishman upon national and international problems is now very much broader and much better informed than before news-bulletins were broadcast. News bulletins, together with topical talks, are definitely raising the standard of education among all English people, and with this generally raised standard, people know more about, and are more interested in, the Empire, than previously. Inter-Imperial trade is also stimulated by the "News". Figures showing the growth or decline of such trade, besides being useful to the student of economics, also show where Empire trade

links are strong, and need maintaining thus, or where they are weak, and need strengthening, by preferential treatment or other means. Public interest in Empire Trade is aroused by topical talks on such subjects, and news of, and talks about, such events as the British Industries Fair.

Radio Talks may be subdivided into talks for schools, talks for farmers, talks for the general public, and speeches and lectures. Of these, the talks for schools have always been chosen so as to give a large selection of subjects related to the Empire. School children (and their parents, for listening to schools programmes is not confined to schools), are learning useful and interesting things from such series of talks as "Life and Work in the British Empire" and "Tracing History Backwards", and "World History" — all relating in a great measure to the history and present conditions of our Empire. Like the School Cinema, the School Radio, while an invaluable aid, as statistics show, cannot be a substitute for teachers and textbooks. Its use is rather to introduce to the children more highly competent and better-informed speakers than their own teachers. eg, geographers with a first-hand knowledge of the Empire would never reach so many children as they do, were it not for the radio. The instruction of children on these lines will undoubtedly increase the next generation's knowledge of Empire conditions and problems, and will induce them to buy Empire goods to a greater extent than most people buy them at present.

While the United States seems to rely upon the cinema most for educating its farmers, Great Britain performs the same valuable service by radio talks by farmers, to farmers, about farming.

Such a series of talks is "For Farmers Only". These

talks are not only practical, i.e. advising the farmer about the best methods of farming, but psychological, in that while catering for the farmer's natural seclusion, they tend to break down the old conservatism and dislike of townsfolk prevalent among farmers. Thus these talks not only educate the farmer, but stimulate his co-operation with others, which should prove invaluable to Empire Trade, since the majority of our overseas wealth lies in land.

The talks for the general public, will, if they deal more with Empire subjects, fill a huge gap which most of us feel in our education; that is, our lack of knowledge about the common geography and history of our Colonies. We can all name more peaks in the Alps than we can in the Rockies or the Blue Mountains of Australia; we know a great deal more about the Rhine and the Danube than we do about the Zambesi; we know much more about the New England settlers than about either Jacques Cartier, so much associated with the early history of Canada, or Captain Cook. I do not advocate study of the Empire while omitting that of foreign countries, for this latter is one of the foundations upon which we shall build a system of international co-operation and goodwill, but a little more adult Empire education would be certainly welcome, and the radio can give it. Talks on Empire subjects by economists would help trade considerably, both by introducing new markets within the Empire for willing manufacturers, and by indirect advertisement of Empire goods.

Speeches at public dinners are intolerably boring to most people, but those relating to the Empire are scarcely ever so. When a member of the Royal Family speaks on such a subject, the speech is really interesting. A good example of this was when H.R.H. The Duke of Gloucester spoke on April 3rd. at the Empire Societies' Dinner. He had just returned from his tour

of Australia and New Zealand, and his speech, which showed his first-hand knowledge of those countries, certainly represented a strengthening of the bonds which bind them to the motherland. The supreme example of how a broadcast by a member of the Royal Family can express our unity of purpose and interest, is when, each Christmas Day, after an hour's programme in which we have had interviews with settlers and natives all over the Empire, H.M. The King addresses all his people who can listen to a wireless set. Even though thousands of miles separate us at all other times, then we are one - and this few minutes' unity invests us with the desire to know more about our unseen fellow-listeners, and to have more to do with them.

Through the medium of broadcast plays much may be done to interest and instruct us in Empire affairs. Dramas founded on the lives of great men, especially musicians, have found favour in the past, and there is room, I am sure, in the broadcast programmes, for plays dealing with the great founders and maintainers of our Empire, like Captain Cook, or Cecil Rhodes, and great explorers of the Empire like Livingstone. Plays dealing with actual life in the Colonies would be welcome, and would not only instruct us, but would be also an indirect advertisement for Empire goods.

Of music and light entertainment it is not necessary to say much. Both are extremely useful in fostering the spirit of brotherhood among the races of the Empire, but their value is not so directly noticeable as the other activities of broadcasting.

Relays of music from India have been attempted in the past, and have proved of great interest to British listeners. Their value seems mainly to be that

they accustom Western peoples to the way in which the Indian's mind works. This "rapprochement" between our ways of thinking constitutes a very important aid for the Empire, and one which will help us to settle the thorny problem of India's constitution more amicably than past disturbances seem to predict.

It is often observed that the humour of our Colonies makes very little, if any, appeal to the Englishman. Broadcasting can accustom us to this Colonial humour, and so help us to understand more easily what the Empire laughs at, which will inevitably strengthen the ties which bind us. The "Canadian Radio Feature" entitled "The Coo-Coo-Noodle Club Program", featuring Bill and Swifty, the famous Canadian radio characters, which was broadcast on April 8th last, seems to point out the way in which this can be done.

But there is another aspect of broadcasting, which the cinema possesses in a lesser degree, which is not so apparent as the examples of their uses quoted above; as a matter of fact it is largely psychological. The extraordinary international appeal of the radio, which no other form of amusement or instruction possesses, has been applied by the B.B.C. to the formation of an Empire service, whereby every listener in the British Empire can listen to a programme of two hours duration every day from the mother-country. What has been done for the Empire is being done for the world; broadcasting is bringing us all closer together. Already many people in England spend a large proportion of their time listening to foreign programmes, — recently a letter from a German who says that he listens more to the B.B.C. programmes than to those of his own land was published in the Radio Times. The value of these bonds in paving the way for an international brotherhood in the future is incontestable. We all realise that what we most need to-day is a long period of peace in which to develop the

resources of our country and of our Empire;— by the process outlined above both the radio and the cinema will do much to bring this about.

Works consulted.

"Motion Pictures" — Talbot.

"Broadcasting" — Hilda Matheson.

The Encyclopædia Britannica.
