

"Round the Empire" Christmas Broadcast

FOR the fourth successive year, a radio broadcast tour of the Empire was conducted on Christmas Day by the British Broadcasting Corporation, with the assistance of the radio telephone services of the Post Office. The result was a great tribute to the technical skill and the organising ability of both administrations. On this occasion, the listener played the part of an eavesdropper on a series of almost private telephone conversations between individuals or families in various parts of the British Isles and other groups in Canada, India, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand. The longest communication link covered on this occasion was employed for an exchange of greetings between two children in the London studio and their grandfather at Wellington, New Zealand. The technically minded listener must tremble to think of the number of electrical circuits used in such a programme and of the possibilities of faults and breakdowns which do not seem to occur. The more mathematically minded may pause to consider whether the number of listeners on such an occasion may be truly termed an astronomical figure. The ordinary person may still have cause to wonder at the fact that when parts of England are covered with snow, Australians can thoroughly enjoy surf-bathing on Christmas Day. Will this wonder be dispelled or increased when television, which is already poking its nose round the corner, transforms this Empire broadcast programme into a pictorial tour with a suitable running commentary?

Winter Floods

THE remarkable persistence of heavy rainfall during the closing months of 1935 has been the cause of much material damage and inconvenience to the inhabitants of low-lying districts and notably in the case of the Thames Valley, where extensive flooding has occurred, and the river has attained heights occasioning serious concern to the authorities. Up to the end of November, the aggregate rainfall of 13.96 inches for the three autumn months exceeded all previous records of the Thames Conservancy Board for more than fifty years. On the last day of December, the aggregate for four months was touching 17 inches and the flow over Teddington Weir was at the rate of 6,500 million gallons per twenty-four hours, a thousand million gallons more than in mid-November, as reported in *NATURE* of November 23 (p. 826), and two thousand million gallons in excess of the 'root figure' of 4,500 million gallons, when the river is flowing bank high. At Lechlade and Radcot, where thousands of acres are under a foot of water, the river reached its highest level since the great floods of 1929. At Reading the stream was in many places a quarter of a mile wide. Flooded areas of equally considerable extent have been reported from various parts of the south and east of England—from Kent, Hampshire, Cambridgeshire, Nottinghamshire, Lincolnshire, Worcestershire and the East Midlands. The infliction of widespread havoc of this kind once more emphasises the importance of the survey undertaken by the Inland Water Survey

Committee of the Ministry of Health, the issue of the first annual report of which in the near future is awaited with much interest. Heavy rains and inundations are unfortunately not confined to Great Britain. From France, Switzerland and elsewhere come reports of gales and floods, and a recrudescence of the conditions described in *NATURE* of November 23. The Rivers Saône, Ardèche, Loire and Garonne are stated to be rising continuously, and in the Rhone Valley, Avignon is again threatened with submergence.

Newspaper Production as an Industry

A BROADSHEET recently issued by P.E.P. (Political and Economic Planning) gives a summary of elementary facts about the Press of Great Britain collected as a preliminary to a constructive investigation of the possibilities of improvements in the Press to meet modern needs. Including for this purpose the entire preparation and publication of newspapers and periodicals, although attention is concentrated mainly on the London daily newspapers, the survey emphasises the extent to which the Press has become an important industry, ranking in size with electricity supply and the manufacture of bricks and tiles and considerably above the brewing or the silk and rayon industry. In the decade 1921–32, its personnel in England and Wales rose from 56,488 to 79,558, and it is characterised by a high proportion of males to females, a low proportion of juvenile workers (less than 9 per cent) and an extremely high proportion of administrative staff (30 per cent), about one sixth of the total being professional workers, a figure four times the average for all industries. Unemployment is low, the net output in terms of money value very high and employment is largely concentrated in large units in a few of the great towns. The two most important points in a newspaper's finances are its advertisement revenue and the price of newsprint, cost of ink being negligible. Production costs (largely wages) come third and editorial services fourth, being equalled for the larger newspapers by the cost of physical distribution. Industrially, the Press is thus healthier and more flourishing than other British industries, but on industrial grounds as well as on the ground of social responsibilities, there is a case for considering whether the financial structure cannot be simplified and made sounder.

Noise

WE have received from the Anti-Noise League at 66 Victoria Street, S.W.1, a reprint of an article on "Noise" by Dr. L. E. C. Hughes, which originally appeared in the columns of the *Electrician*. The League is doing admirable work in sponsoring a considerable number of publications on the various aspects of noise. These will be found both interesting and of service to the largely increasing public which is concerned with the problem of noise, whether from mechanical transport, modern housing or other contributory cause. That the country has become noise conscious is reflected in the noise abatement activities of the Ministry of Transport, the Ministry of Health, the National Physical Laboratory, the