

PROSPECTS for TELEVISION

A KORERO Report

TELEVISION HAS been peeping over the horizon for many years. By 1939 it had shown that it worked and had a great future; it had also shown its inadequacies. Several years of war, with intensive research in the science of radio, have achieved technical advances which will bring, undoubtedly, clearer, larger, more reliable, more interesting pictures. The place of television in the post-war world, however, is impossible to predict; as one writer says, "it has been subject (at least in the United States) to enough high-powered prose and woolly prognostication to sink a lesser invention." But it is both here to stay and ready to go. Many times it has been described as a certain billion-dollar industry. The many difficult problems of its re-establishment, in Great Britain and in the United States, are less often stressed. However great is its ultimate success, it is certain that widespread broadcast television will come neither quickly nor easily. But with the end of the war it will have the chance to start again, to plan its future soundly. That future is at present causing such a hullabaloo as has never been heard before in the radio industry.

Implementing recommendations made (in 1935 by the first Television Committee) for the establishment and development of a public television service in Great Britain, the first such service in the world was begun at the B.B.C.'s television station at Alexandra Palace in November, 1936. By 1939 (according to the report, published early this year, of the second Television Committee) the service had reached high standard: programme technique had made great progress, entertainment value was good. Television receivers in use by the public, however, were not many more than twenty thousand. Reasons for this were the high cost of sets (£20 to £75), belief that the price would soon fall, fear of

obsolescence, and the impression the service was still in the experimental stage. Shortly before the outbreak of war, when the Alexandra Palace television station was shut down for military reasons, a demand for the extension of television service to the provinces had become insistent; it was urged in Parliament, in the press, and by the radio industry. Plans for operation on a semi-national scale, bringing television within reach of the majority of the densely populated areas of Great Britain, of course had to be shelved until after the war.

Research since the War

Increasing demands of war made organized research impossible, and, apart from important developments in radio location (which will have a direct bearing on television when military security allows), little progress has been made in Great Britain in broadcast television. In other countries—principally the United States, possibly France—research and investigation have not been brought to such a standstill: it is doubtful whether first place in a science in which she once led the world is still held by Great Britain. The committee advised strongly that the London service should be reinstated as soon as possible, and should not be deferred for the uncertain period needed to give an opportunity of incorporating any fundamental improvement in the system. Furthermore extension of television to the more populous provincial centres should be made as soon as possible after the opening of the service in London. The issue, the committee stated, was not merely of providing entertainment for a limited number of persons, or even of laying the foundation of a national service, but of building an important new industry in the manufacture of television apparatus into what could be a valuable export trade.