

TELEVISION from CHRISTIAN'S VIEWPOINT

"AM I my brother's keeper?" is the question often asked by those who are reluctant to make a sacrifice for the sake of a weaker brother. Paul, the Apostle, was firmly convinced that he was his brother's keeper, and said: "All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any" (I Corinthians 6:12).

In a day such as ours when means are multiple for self-indulgence, self-denial becomes one of the keenest tests of true discipleship and Christian stamina. Marvellous inventions increase, and likewise the varied uses to which they are devoted. Men are steadily building good machines, but they are not always used for the purpose of building good character. Good tools are bad tools in the hands of bad men.

Television Takes Over

The latest, and perhaps the most potent in its impact for good or evil, is the greedy monster, television. It is a greedy monster because it invades the home and generally dominates the household. "Either master it or it will master you," says a man who confesses he has come under its tyrannical spell. "I offer the following advice to all, do not think of putting a television set into your home until you have first conquered your own will." To that bit of advice should be added: Do not put a television set into your home until you have conscientiously and prayerfully considered how much you love your home, your children, and your own soul. The writer said, "... until you have first conquered your own will"; but what ability has a young child to conquer his own will? He becomes the victim or the victor because of the choices made by his parents. His tastes are determined by those of his elders. On the television set a child may see more evil in a few hours than the parents have seen throughout their lives. The child is wholly unprepared to meet the severe test, far less fortified today than his parents were in their childhood when there was more religion in the home and there were less worldly attractions.

The child is an incurable mimic. The cover of a popular magazine carried, without comment, the picture of a television set showing a wrestling match in action. Two small boys were making a perfect reproduction of the scene, keeping a close watch of the action on the screen.

Criminal Impulses

Distressing headlines in almost every daily paper bear evidence that the growing number of murders committed by teen-agers is based upon no other motive than an urge to kill, a tendency particularly dominating children and immature people. A recent news item gave the account of a 16-year-old baby sitter who strangled a six-year-old girl.

"I did it," she said, "but I don't have any reason." It was revealed, however, that the deed came into her vision after she had watched a murder mystery on television in the child's home.

Recently, too, a 16-year-old high school boy hacked his mother's body to pieces, and poured kerosene over the body "so she wouldn't be found." The boy's father said: "I blame television. Too much boom boom. They get ideas from these crime and detective programs." That boy had always been considered a very good boy.

A boy of twelve walked into a store, flourished a gun, and demanded money. The merchant handed him the money with the left hand and with the right hand snatched the gun from the boy. When the

boy was asked why he did it, he replied that it seemed so easy over the radio. How much easier it will look when he sees it done on the television screen!

Too many are willing to jeopardize their own lives and their children's lives rather than sacrifice the pleasure of seeing some interesting things on the television screen. But the sacrifice is infinitesimal in comparison with the risk they are taking. No one is safe. Television led the boy to hack his mother to pieces. There may be other mothers, fathers, brothers, or sisters hacked to pieces before parents realize the danger.

Victims Selected

It is no compliment to women that radio programs which appeal to the mind and the emotions at the lowest possible level are slanted at the women and children. A moving-picture producer frankly stated: "We're trying to slant our pictures toward women. Women are the backbone of the picture business. If they want to see a movie, they drag the man to it." Television producers appear to be slanting their productions toward the children, and are selecting the hours children are most likely to be watching. The tobacco and brewery industries have been alert to add this new device to their other methods of moulding the thought of millions of people and especially of the young. They advertise in magazines, over the radio, and now by television. To popularize their drink, the liquor industry advertises by characters popular with children.

A Des Moines attorney testified in hearings on liquor advertising: "I was shocked to hear a radio program sponsored by a brewery advertising its product." To arrest their attention, familiar names are mentioned — Johnnie, Billy, Mary, Susan, Jane, Mike, Bob. They are told how to entertain their friends: "One of the best things you can set before him is a bottle of . . . [a brand of beer]." Another advertisement was directed to the girls, telling them how to make their parties lively. "If the party is at your home, that's the time to bring out . . . [same brand of beer]. The old-fashioned goodness and friendly flavor of . . . will put everyone at ease and the party will start clicking right away." On television they show dancing beer bottles, and the right way to hold the glass when beer is poured into it. Following a favourite program for children comes a nationally known beer company's advertisement. In a home, a six-year-old girl sang the words of this advertisement.

For teen-age boys, the sport angle is employed, and all sorts of crooked methods are used. It is believed that television will prove to be the most dangerous of all agencies favoring liquor. Advertising Age anticipates that "television will soon become the natural medium for brewing companies. . . . The vice-president of . . . brewing company held the brewers' convention in rapt attention as he told them how his company's video spot campaign resulted in a fifty per cent increase in distribution." They boast of the "terrific results" they are getting.

The tobacco companies employ similar methods, showing comic cigars that dance and sing. This is done to create in children an appetite for tobacco. A survey showed that already more than half the teen-agers of Chicago's public schools drink. No doubt, surveys would show similar conditions in many, if not in all, other places. This drinking on the part of young boys and girls is said by a judge in a circuit court to be ' the "direct cause of from 60 to 90 per cent of the divorce and criminal cases in the courts of today." In spite of that deplorable fact, there are money-greedy men who are deliberately campaigning to lure children to drink and to use tobacco. Besides making this generation of demoralized children the depraved nation of tomorrow, those who are interested only in money-making are under the certain judgment of God, who has said through His Word: "Neither . . . thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, .. shall inherit the kingdom of God" (I Corinthians 6:10).

Not a great deal can be expected from the children when so many of their mothers are becoming alcoholics. The chairman of a medical committee on alcoholism gives the information that between three and five million Americans are excessive drinkers and about 850,000 of them are chronic alcoholics. One out of five of these is a woman. Television will add a toll of victims to the casualty list

more effectively than the other sinister agencies, because its influence is far more subtle and reaches greater multitudes.

Television is still in its infancy, copying the worst of the radio and of the motion pictures.

Alarmed, by the increasing trend toward violence in TV programs, California citizens took action. In a protest to the Federal Communications Commission was cited the black record of one week's programs, Sunday through Saturday: 91 murders, 7 holdups, 3 kidnappings, 10 thefts, 4 burglaries, 2 jail breaks, 1 murder by explosion, 2 suicides, 1 blackmailing. "Too numerous to mention were brawls, assault and battery, drunkenness, crooked sheriffs, crooked judges."

A prominent preacher said: "Television can be used for good. It has tremendous possibilities, but I am afraid it is being used for evil almost exclusively and that it will do more harm than Hollywood to demoralize the youth of our country.... and while there will be good programs on television, there will be so many of the other kind that it is going to be most difficult to put on the one and blot out the other."

"For generations we have refused to take our children to the night clubs, theatres, wrestling matches and boxing bouts. Now these very scenes are brought right into the home and displayed before the children's eyes. It costs nothing to see them, except a loss of moral standards. In their early life they now can become acquainted with sin in its vilest form. No longer will parents be able to protect them from the awful things that go on in the world."

Another writer said that in his whole life he had never been able to be free from the con-amination he received from fifteen minutes' reading of filthy literature. A few bad programs could mar a child's whole life, and that child may be your child, Parents!

"Keeping the Family at Home"

A variety of excuses is given for tolerating, by the stealth of television, the advent of murder into the home for the children to see and copy. It is argued that television will keep the family at home. It has been said that "radio's social position remains low — lower than the movies which is about as far down as the ladder goes." The television's immediate demand when it is likely to come, and will teach the danger of vile things and prepare the children to resist them. They will early develop the child's interest in the desirable things of life, and, above all, in the extreme necessity of making life worth living by taking God and His Word into his life. The noted commentator said she found that since the television set has moved into her home "conversation, reading, music, and games have all gone out." When children 14, 15, and 16 years old have to be sent to the gallows or to prison it is a serious indictment against parents and the adults who permitted the circumstances that induced the crimes, and may well be called "casualties of parental and adult carelessness." There should be less head-shaking in deprecation of the alarming condition, and more head-bowing in shame because of the adults' neglect. "But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea" (Matthew 18:6).

The Family Altar

' It is constantly stated by men in high places, by those who have to enforce the laws, by judges in the courts of domestic relations, and by conscientious ministers of the Gospel, that there is an appalling dearth of Christian homes in the world. If our civilization is to survive, there must be a return to religion in the home. Schools are forbidden to teach it; the time spent in the church is too short for sufficient, effective, individual instruction. This teaching must be done in the home. The family is not together long enough, it is argued, for family devotions. But now we find that families can be together six to eight hours watching the television screen. What a marvelous country we should have if the family would spend that time in reading the Word of God, discussing its beauty and comfort, and

uniting in family prayer! God demands it of parents: "And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up" (Deuteronomy 6:6, 7). This command was spoken to the Children of Israel when the age was not freighted with so much danger for the children as it is today, when the world with so much of its evil and so little of its good has entered the home. "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth" (Colossians 3:2). With eyes glued to the television every available moment, there is not much likelihood that God, His Word, His will, His coming will be given any place, much less first place, in the mind, in the heart, and in the life.

Too Much Competition

The question is raised, "Can television not be captured for Christ?" It probably could be if it did not have to compete with the motion pictures which have millions of dollars backing them; and if the public appetite for prize fights, drinking scenes, mystery-crime themes, and immorality were not so abnormally developed as it is. Television in general as it has begun its career is itself probably the most formidable competitor of television as a spiritual force. "As I read about television and see what it is doing in other ways, I do not believe there is too great a future for religious broadcasting by this means. Once the newness has worn off, it will draw no more interest, I believe, than any other medium." That statement summarizes the opinion of an outstanding evangelist. "Today's television programs are far from desirable," says the director of a children's hour. "That the present crop of religious telecasts appeals to few is evident from the last survey of a New York audience-measurement agency. Religious shows had a rating of 1.3 — lowest of all programs compared with comedy variety at the top with 21.1." Children's favourites are, first, the four-time divorced film celebrity, and then three gory westerns.

To make the program attractive to most viewers of today, it will have to be highly for many programs, induces the reproduction and copying of radio and cinema programs of a low calibre. An actor comments on the kind of programs produced for television: "The screen isn't the only small thing in television. Smallness seems to be the outstanding characteristic of the whole medium right now. It has small minds, small talents, small budgets."

A program director admits that it is hard to get good programs. "I think a lot of the ones we have ought to be cancelled; but what are you going to put in their place? Anything is better than nothing." A celebrated columnist expresses her opinion of the programs: "I am not interested in what appears on the television screen, am constantly bored, and even, sometimes, revolted." "Most of them are unmitigated tripe; many of them are dramatizations of tenth-rate detective stories; very few of the comics are even occasionally funny enough to get a real laugh, and the clichés are excruciating."

If rowdy-vaudeville shows, almost nude women, suicides, acts of violence by demented persons, battered and bloody prize fighters, glamorized drinking scenes, and gangsters committing all manner of crimes are what the family is kept at home to see, it would be better if they were not at home to be contaminated by those character-destroying influences and to be contributors to the vicious influence that such trash may have on the younger members of the family.

Another justification offered for the presence of what a well-known commentator calls an "infernal machine" — the television set — is that it keeps the father out of the saloon. But this, too, is a limping excuse; for the saloonkeeper has lost no time in putting into his saloon the biggest and best television set he can afford, in order to keep fathers in the saloons, and, not too infrequently, mothers also.

Children, they say, will likely see these things later anyway. But the way to meet temptation is not by yielding to it. The right sort of parents will fortify them for the test dramatized. It has been suggested that puppets tell the story. Already, there has been cinema-like capitalization of any account of man's morality related by the Word. And reviewers boast of the fact, saying that an actress plays a "coy"

Delilah to a "lustful Samson" and "gently pokes fun at our manners, morals and legends." In many of the so-called religious programs so much has been added for dramatic interest, so much omitted of the truth, that one is almost led to believe God's solemn warning is no longer in the Bible: "If any man shall add unto these things [the words of the prophecy of the Bible], God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book" (Revelation 22:18, 19).

The early Temples and the present church edifices were established as the sacred places in which to worship God. The exhortation still stands and demands obedience: "And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is" (Hebrews 10:24, 25). Those who do not care to go to church are not very likely to be interested in religious programs.

It is thought, too, that television will affect radio preaching adversely. If television follows the pattern it has been following in the early stages of its career, rather than being captured for the preaching of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, it is much more likely to be, as suggested by the editor of a Christian magazine, the effective means for "spreading indecency and all manner of error." "This appears to be another of the latter-day inventions, that is a ready tool for the devil to use in his plan for rushing humanity forward to the great harvest of iniquity."