alien voices. Even when it is heard, it is too often checked and corrected and misinterpreted by unsympathetic voices from the South so that it appears hesitant and confused or else strident and aggressive. It is almost forced to become self-centred and self-conscious, precisely what a truly national voice ought not to be. In a satisfactory broadcasting system it would be able to take its traditions and ideals for granted – not to mention the elementary facts of the Scottish scene – and to look calmly at the wide world from its own point of view instead of having to shout in the tones of a recalcitrant province in order to make itself heard at all.

CHAPTER XIII

BROADCASTING AND LANGUAGE

I am always sorry when any language is lost,
because languages are the pedigree of nations
Dr. Johnson

1. *The voice of Scotland*

What has been said of the voice of Scotland, taken metaphorically, applies also in a more literal sense. The traditional speech of Scotland is subject to the same distorting influences, and the average Scotsman is deprived of his traditional standards without acquiring any others. To those who care nothing about language, this will seem a small matter, and complaints about it will be merely silly. To those who recognise that speech, as the expression of thought and emotion, at once reveals and to some extent determines the character of men and of nations, it will seem that the treatment of Scotland in this respect also leaves much to be desired. If we may adopt the view of Dr. Johnson, Scotland is being deprived of her pedigree, as of so much else.

This is a topic of special difficulty to our English brothers, as I know from sad experience. Since to them English is just Standard Southern English, they find it difficult or impossible to understand even the terms on which any discussion must proceed. A summary attempt to clarify these terms is unlikely to be successful, but it cannot be omitted here. Readers allergic to philology may be advised to go straight on to the next Chapter.

The distinctive speech of Scotland has a centuries-old tradition and history of its own which has nothing to do with Southern English. It is derived from the speech of the invading Angles who occupied the Lothians as well as what is now Northumberland. As is sometimes said rather smugly in Scotland, the acute

Angles went North, and the obtuse Angles went South. I like to add that the right Angles went to Yorkshire.

Southern English, on the other hand, is a development of Mercian and has been dominated by London, which has suffered from a kind of verbal instability since the time of Chaucer. Most of the traditional vowel sounds have changed, as is still happening in Cockney to-day. This has produced some of the peculiarities of English spelling: the written vowels, for example, are pronounced in a way which to any Continental speaker sounds perverse. The trilled 'r', universal elsewhere, has faded and has further affected the English vowel sounds, many of which have become diphthongs and even polyphthongs. In this, as in other matters, it is the English who have deviated from the European tradition.

In this deviation the traditional Scottish pronunciation of English had no part: it retained the pure vowels and trilled 'r' of Europe and the rest of the world. This is why it is still easier for Scotsmen to learn the pronunciation of foreign languages.

The Scottish speech is thus a form – in some ways an older form – of English or Anglish: it has nothing to do with Gaelic or any Keltic language. It may be called a dialect of English (or if you prefer it, of Insular West Teutonic); but it is not, and never has been, a dialect of Southern English. To make this clear, let us describe its original form as 'Inglis', which is its old name. It is now often called 'Scots' and also 'Lallans', that is, the language of the Scottish Lowlands.

Until the Union of the Crowns in 1603, Inglis was the language of the Court, the Law, the Church, and the Universities. It was a language of great richness and had its own literature and its own poets, too often misdescribed as Chaucerians.

After the Court moved to London in 1603 the old Inglis inevitably declined, but it survived – as Lallans – in the dialect of the people. This has found literary expression in prose writers like Walter Scott and Robert Louis Stevenson, but above all in poets from Robert Burns to Hugh MacDiarmid. The English may regard it as the speech of yokels or even of scullions, but there is no dialect of England that can be compared with it.

It still trails its clouds of glory and, except where contaminated by bad English or American, is a perfect instrument for humour and for tenderness. Even to-day its distinctive vocabulary is amazingly rich.

There is no subject in which Scotland receives less understanding from South of the Border. Some of the things said are almost incredible in their fatuity. A reputable critic can dismiss modern writing in the Scottish dialect as a kind of Jingoism and can treat it with what look like efforts to be funny: apparently ignorant that words have different senses and association in different contexts, he takes to task a modern Scottish poet, Mr. Sydney Goodsir Smith, for writing 'Lowse we the bands' – a phrase intelligible to every Scottish ploughman. 'Come now, Mr. Smith', remarks this sensitive judge of language – 'How *lowse* can you get?' If we could get rid of lousy criticism, we might get as far as 'Laus Deo'.

What we are mainly concerned with here is not Lallans but something different. Partly through the influence of the Authorised Version of the Bible there grew up in Scotland a new form of speech. This became the language of the pulpit, the law-courts, and the universities; and because these institutions retained a measure of independence, it continued to be the speech of educated Scotsmen. I will call it Educated Scottish English – as opposed to Standard Southern English. Apart from occasional Scottish idioms and expressions it uses the vocabulary and grammar of standard English: it is in fact simply the Scottish way of pronouncing English. The essential point is that in many respects it is continuous in its pronunciation – but only in its pronunciation – with the older language which I have called 'Inglis'. To treat it as an unsuccessful attempt to imitate the accents of the South is ridiculous.

Why should this be so difficult to understand? We can all recognise American English, Canadian English, Australian English, even Irish English. None of these countries has the slightest wish to abandon its own pronunciation in an effort to imitate the sounds of Standard Southern English. Educated Scottish English is no less honourable than they. With even less plausibility can it be regarded as merely a degeneration from

the speech of Southern England; for unlike them it has an age-long independent tradition of its own.

Of all these varieties of English, Standard Southern English may well be the richest and the best. At least to my own ear it is at its best one of the loveliest and most flexible forms of human speech. But this does not mean that other forms are without their own excellence and their own standards. There may be, I believe there are, general linguistic and aesthetic standards by which different languages may be judged, if only with the utmost caution; but it would be arbitrary and parochial to identify these general standards with the conventional standards of Southern English or to suppose that Southern English is the sole norm by which all languages, or even all varieties of English, must be judged.

2. *Its treatment in broadcasting*

So far as Scotland is concerned, the sad thing about British broadcasting is that it ignores traditional Scottish standards of speech and puts nothing adequate in their place.

This is true to some extent even of 'Inglis' or 'Scots' or 'Lallans' in the Scottish programmes. Some speakers and singers are perfect in their pronunciation and are a joy to hear. Others make the uncouth noises with which unfortunately we are only too familiar. Worst of all are those who make the language 'refained' by introducing a mixture of sounds from the South, or who pronounce almost every syllable as if it were Southern English. There seems to be no standard recognised at all, and a great opportunity has been missed.

The main trouble, however, is concerned with what I have called Educated Scottish English. This we are allowed to hear occasionally, with varying degrees of excellence, from lawyers or teachers or ministers of religion, and, on a rather lower level, from commentators on sport; but the standards, such as they are, must inevitably be set by the regular official broadcasters. In its English regions the policy of the B.B.C. apparently is to select these from individuals who speak Southern English with some trace of a local accent. If Scotland is an English province it has to be treated on the same principle. Hence too many

official broadcasters in Scotland – there are some notable exceptions – appear to be Scottish speakers who have learnt to mispronounce Southern English in a way supposed in London to be characteristically Scottish. Whether they are specially trained for this purpose or discovered by research remains a mystery.

This means that the average Scotsman is offered a hybrid standard which is alien and artificial and can be no use to him at all or indeed to anybody else.

The reasons given for this decision are even stranger than the decision itself. The first is that official broadcasters must be intelligible in every part of Scotland. The second is that they must be intelligible to foreigners (including presumably Englishmen). Both these reasons reveal an abyss of ignorance so great as to make the head reel.

What we are talking about is not a revival of Gaelic or even of 'Lallans', but merely the intelligent use of Educated Scottish English. This, although it may give some indication of where the speaker comes from – the Highlands or Lowlands, the East or the West – is intelligible to any Scotsman, educated or less educated, from any part of the land. It is incomparably more intelligible to the vast mass of the Scottish people than any variety of Southern English even when mispronounced in a way regarded as suitable for Scottish ears. To foreigners it is usually more intelligible than Southern English because it keeps its pure vowels and trilled 'r's and at its best pronounces every syllable slowly and distinctly instead of running them together. It is, in fact, how foreigners expect English to be spoken. To argue that Scotsmen should be deprived of their own standard speech on the ground that this would be unintelligible to foreigners is not only unconvincing in itself: it is directly contrary to the facts.

What is more, good educated Scottish speech is perfectly intelligible even to Englishmen. It offers no more difficulty than educated American speech – perhaps less. No doubt if you have never before heard a different way of talking good English, you may find some slight difficulty at first. Some modern Englishmen may be for a moment puzzled to hear the word 'extraordinary' pronounced with all its six syllables instead of the two

to which it is so often reduced; but this is an obstacle not impossible to overcome.

The alleged reasons for ignoring Scottish standards are all the more startling when it is remembered what vast quantities of the most vulgar English speech are imposed daily on the Scots in their own country. No one asks whether this is intelligible to them or not.

It is hard to see why Scotland should be deprived of her traditional standards even if these seem uncouth to Englishmen judging by conventional standards of their own. To Americans of the Middle West the English accent, as they call it, seems a curious patois which is not only affected, but almost unintelligible. The English would rightly be the first to resent it if their standards of speech had to be defended against such alien criticisms.

In the past Englishmen have treated the Scottish pronunciation with more respect. Wordsworth could say of it,

> 'Choice word and measured phrase, above the reach of ordinary men; a stately speech.'

Matthew Arnold could complain that it made Scotsmen sound much more impressive than was warranted by what they said. More recently a typical product of Eton and Balliol has written: 'A Scottish accent can be so easy on the ear that the speaker actually endears himself by that alone.'

Such judgements may serve to remind us that the music and dignity of Scottish speech can be admired by lovers of the English language; but the right of Scotsmen to develop their own standards in their own way should not be made to depend on testimonials from the South.

3. *The effects of London policy*

What in brief are the effects of the arbitrary linguistic policy which Scotland has to endure?

In the first place it projects a false picture of Scottish speech as if it were an uncouth deviation from Southern English. This comes out even in historical plays, where proud old Scottish ladies are made to talk in the mincing accents of an Edinburgh Miss recently returned from a six months finishing course in

London. Worse still are the professedly Scottish serials where half the cast seem to imagine they can conceal their Cockney vowels by sporadic attempts at a trilled 'r' or even by saying 'I ken' at the beginning of a sentence. This is not only an offence to lovers of language: it puts the supposedly Scottish scene completely out of focus.

What is more serious is that this false image tends, so to speak, to make itself true: it sets standards which people begin to follow. The artificial and second-rate language of Scottish broadcasting is being imitated, however unsuccessfully, as in the case of the young lady who said proudly, 'Ai cen't tock Scatch'. In the course of time Scottish speakers may conform to the stereotype of themselves as feeble imitations of Englishmen, and very poor imitations at that.

Scottish English, like Southern English, has many uncouth varieties and needs standards at least as badly. Many Englishmen seem unable to distinguish good Scottish English from its most degenerate forms, and British broadcasting appears to share this disability. The English of the less educated sort can get their standards from their own official broadcasters with their golden voices – sometimes perhaps slightly off the gold standard. Scotsmen are given instead a sort of hybrid artificial language as their model – one which has no tradition or history behind it. If they cannot have their own standards, it would be far better to offer them good Southern English as their model. Why should they be fobbed off with an imitation which doesn't even pretend to be other than second rate?

Curiously enough, these distortions are extended even to place-names in Scotland. There are, to take one example, many place-names with a hammer stroke on the last syllable – like Dunbar, Dunblane, Dunkeld, Dundee. For some unknown reason many Englishmen insist on putting the emphasis on the first syllable, even when surrounded by Scotsmen using the correct pronunciation. Sometimes, it is true, they reverse this process and put the accent perversely on the last syllable when it is really on the first, as in names like Oban and Forfar. It is amazing that such mispronunciations should be taken over even in Scottish broadcasting by men whom one would expect

to know better. It is as if they wanted to wipe Scotland off the map!

A friend of mine, a fierce upholder of the English language, tells me that the broadcasting authorities seem to have issued a decree that wherever there is a vulgar pronunciation of English words, this is the pronunciation to be used. Perhaps there is some exaggeration in this; but by parity of reasoning it would seem that some tame Englishman is assigned to headquarters in Scotland with orders that his pronunciation of Scottish place-names (and also of family names) is always to be followed, especially if he has never heard them before. This seems to be thought more genteel.

One beauty of Scottish speech (and I am not talking of a slum language adulterated with ungrammatical English or American) is that it is clear, decisive, confident, every syllable pronounced like the stroke of a hammer – the expression and mirror of the Scottish character. It is pitiful to-day to hear Scottish children who have been given no clear standard to follow: all they know is that it is wrong to trill their 'r's. This is specially evident when they talk to some amiable Englishman speaking in what to them is an alien patois hard to understand. A Scots boy from a humble home where some dialect of Lallans is spoken can without much difficulty adjust his speech to Educated Scottish English because this retains the vowel-sounds and trilled 'r's to which he is accustomed. Indeed there is a long tradition of being bilingual in this respect – of speaking the language of Burns for some purposes and the language of the Bible for others. When this standard is taken away, he is left in a confusion and uncertainty which may lead to self-distrust, if not to neurosis. Perhaps this may help to explain why we are so often told that the youth of Scotland are lacking in the power of self-expression.

To deprive the children of Scotland of the standards that are their birth-right must seem to any lover of language to be wicked. Yet this can be done in all innocence by a few amiable and irresponsible English ladies and gentlemen. Surely if anything in the world should be decided by Scotsmen, it is their own standard of speech.

4. *What should be done?*

These contentions may still be open to misunderstanding, even perhaps to the absurd interpretation that a narrow patriotism should prevent Scotsmen from learning to speak, or even to understand, the noble language of Southern England to the best of their ability.

It is natural that Scotsmen educated or long resident in England should modify or abandon their own form of speech. Some retain their native accents undiluted, like the gentleman who remarked that even after twenty years in the South he had not succeeded in learning how to mispronounce the letter 'r' correctly. Others may be able to attain some degree of approximation to standard Southern English if they follow good models – what is pitiful are their unsuccessful attempts to imitate a kind of suburban English far inferior to their own. Yet others, sometimes able men who have no ear for language, invent a hybrid language of strange noises never heard on either side of the Border. All of this is obviously their own concern.

What we are concerned with here is only the public policy of broadcasting in Scotland. There are other influences making a dead set against Scottish speech – most obviously some teachers of elocution. But it is the power of broadcasting that is decisive, and what has been argued here is simply that Scotsmen ought to determine how that power is to be used.

This means that Scottish control of broadcasting should be real and not illusory. Such a claim is, one would have thought, obviously reasonable in itself, and, as we have seen, it goes far beyond the sphere of language, however important this may be from some points of view.

The obvious solution – if we may revert to the more general problem – is to have an independent Scottish Broadcasting Corporation which enjoys real control and is able to meet the special needs of Scotland. The best way of doing this would be to have some sort of British system in which genuinely independent regions could treat with one another, and could borrow material from one another, on a footing of equality; but this

ideal should not be used as a device for postponing all attempts to meet the urgent and immediate needs of Scotland herself.

We need not pause to expose the arguments which purport to prove that Scotland has neither the money nor the ability to do what is done by every nation of comparable wealth and size, and even by many which cannot be compared with her in either respect. If Scottish broadcasting could be freed from its Southern shackles, we might hope for a burst of creative energy. At the very least there would be a new centre where able young men would have some chance to develop their powers freely in their own country instead of having to seek their fortune in the South.

5. *The pattern*

The development of broadcasting in Britain displays in miniature a pattern of the treatment to which Scotland is increasingly subjected.

A new situation arises, and a new institution has to be created to meet it. The institution is at once centralised under the rigid domination of London. There is a pretence at devolution, but the powers devolved are restricted and controlled on every side, not least as regards finance. The central authority takes decisions, which may or may not be wise, about the English provinces. These decisions are unhesitatingly applied to Scotland without regard to Scottish opinion, which can do nothing but grumble and protest. When, in reply to protests, reasons are given for these decisions, they are manifestly not the real reasons: they would not deceive a child. If they were the real reasons, they would show that the authority was incompetent to take any rational decision at all. The authority remains blandly innocent of all the damage it may be doing, and the snarls of protest are put down complacently to the unreasonable nationalism for which the Scots are notorious. Yet there is no other possible means of redress.

The revealing thing in all this is that there seems to be no genuine English interest involved. If the broadcasting monopoly could be broken, this would be to the advantage of all Britain, and not least of England herself.

CHAPTER XIV

THE SCHOOLS

The children of the poor must be supported and sustained on the charge of the kirk, trial being taken whether the spirit of docility be in them found or not. If they be found apt to learning and letters, then may they not, – we mean, neither the sons of the rich, nor yet of the poor, – be permitted to reject learning, but must be charged to continue their study, so that the commonwealth may have some comfort by them.

First Book of Discipline (John Knox)

1. *Past and present*

At the beginning of the present century it could still be claimed, with some show of plausibility, that Scotland enjoyed the best system of public education in the world. All children, even those from the poorest homes, were supposed to receive a sound elementary schooling. From the Shorter Catechism they learned that man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him for ever; and with the aid of the multiplication table (which was commonly bound up with it) they were able to deal with the practical difficulties of the work-a-day world. Those of them who possessed genuine talent and worked hard were able, if not without sacrifice on their own part and on the part of their parents, to become citizens (as they were called) of the ancient Scottish Universities. In relation to her size Scotland was said to have the largest number of schools in Europe and the highest proportion of university students. The success attained in every walk of life by the products of her educational system contributed to her national pride and to the reputation she enjoyed throughout the world.

Such at least was the Scottish legend, and it certainly embodies a great ideal – cherished at least since the Reformation,