

Listening In

As I have not been acquainted with radio very long, I do not pretend to be an authority on this subject, but, from the very fact of my comparatively short acquaintance with it, I believe that I am more vividly impressed by its vagaries than your average listener-in, who has been a fan many years longer than I. For is it not a fact that the more we come in contact with a thing the less we notice it? Surely this can be applied to radio as well as to anything else.

When a radio is first installed in a house, there is a period, all too short, during which the novelty of it is sufficient to hold the entire family enthralled, or at least in a state of quiet contentment, with no attention paid to the choice of program. Quickly on the heels of this period comes another, a more permanent one, when each member of the family becomes addicted to a particular type of program. Thus mother, if she is a bit overdeveloped, wants her exercises; father wants his sport broadcasts, sister wants her dance music, and little brother wants his blood-curdling detective serial. If two or more of these items are scheduled for the same time, there is apt to be trouble. In fact, there is trouble, plenty of it.

There are some broadcasts which nobody who has passed the first stage of listening-in seems to want. I am referring to the radio play. Oh! There may be some perverted individuals who enjoy them, but I have yet to meet such a person. The very idea behind the radio play is wrong. It is difficult enough for the audience to ferret out the full portent of a play when they receive it through the two senses of sight and hearing, without making them wholly dependent on one, and that a quite fallible one. Until the television screen is attached to my radio, I shall continue promptly tuning out any station which ventures to broadcast a play.

Yes, the radio play is annoying to me; but there is another phase of radio which is even more irksome. The play may be avoided by a slight manipulation of the dials when the first symptoms of it are perceived, but one finds the advertising nuisance at every station. I am, of course, aware that our radio systems are supported by advertising but this is not the only way in which they may be supported. England has a better way. But here in America

we must either grin and bear it when the voice comes from our loudspeakers announcing that 'this famous prima donna will now sing the enthralling old Spanish song, "Angela Mia," and that reminds me that it may interest you to know that Ziltch products are good for lumbago, acidosis, athlete's foot, etc.' or throw our sets on the dump. The latter alternative is a luxury which I have often wished I could afford.

Have you ever considered the great variety of voices that come through the ether, and what a lovely effect could be produced if they were arranged in ascending or descending order of pitch? Apparently, no one influential in the radio business has ever thought of this, for, as things are now, what a jumble of tones are thrown together! Sometimes the effect of this jumble is quite good, but some other times—it's just too bad. One incident sticks in my memory which illustrates this very nicely. A popular speaker was announcing for the Schmeling-Stribling prize fight broadcast, pronouncing the German boxer's name in true American style; short 'a' in the Max, and, by some strange process, reducing the surname to 'Smelling.' That was quite all right. Everybody knew whom he meant. But when the bout was over and the suave voice of the studio announcer cut in, telling us that Max (long "a") Schmeling (German "sch," Latin "e") was the winner, it seemed almost as if he had said, "That hobo was trying to drag you down to his own level; so here's a little refinement to jack you up again."

Speaking of voices, it is regrettable that the microphone is so "cruel" to women's voices. Women are, after all, better singers than men, and the "mike" is putting itself under a handicap by not being more careful of their voices. Authorities now tell us that there is a certain type of feminine voice that is actually improved by transmission, but if that is true, I'm afraid that type of voice must be rather poor in the original.

The field in which radio has made its greatest strides in recent years is in the elimination of static. I understand that this was once the great impediment to good reception; but that was before my time. I have never had any trouble with static. It is, with your modern radio, a thing of the past, except in a few cases.

There is one pleasure of radio listening which is present from the first time the listener hears "broadcasting from Los Angeles" or "from Vancouver" coming from the

mouth of the loudspeaker, and continues until he has twirled his last dial. This is the thrill of distance. It makes the heart leap. It brings the imagination into play. One can just lean back in one's armchair and imagine the leaping waves of the Pacific breaking on the sand beaches of California or the craggy coasts of British Columbia, as the case may be. It seems infinitely better than the New York or Montreal programs, though, in reality, the greater the distance the poorer the reception. Perhaps its very elusiveness,—here one minute, gone the next,—is the reason for its charm.

And, moreover, although fine tone, good reception, and reserve power are admittedly splendid qualities in radio, I believe that the man who can bring in far places on his set is prouder of it than the man whose radio can reproduce music, in all its original volume and quality, from a nearby station. Of course, these good qualities usually go hand-in-hand, especially in expensive sets, but in moderately priced outfits one sometimes finds a freak, which has one quality in a striking degree and not enough of the others to merit mention. Mine is such a freak. And its strong point is—thank Heavens!—distance.

—J.M., '34



What is the worst of woes that wait on age?
 What stamps the wrinkle deeper on the brow?
 To view each loved one blotted from life's page,
 And be alone on earth as I am now.

—Lord Byron

What I aspired to be,
 And was not, comforts me.

—Browning

