

AUGUST 11, 1939

EDITORIAL AND BUSINESS OFFICES:

93-107 Featherston Street, Wellington, C.I.
Post Office Box 1070.
Telephone, 46-520.
Telegraphic Address: "Listener," Wellington.

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Rates (including postage):

Twelve months: Inland (within New Zealand and dependencies)	15/-
Great Britain and British Countries	17/6
Foreign Countries (including United States of America)	20/-

Subscriptions may be sent to the "New Zealand Listener," Publications Department, P.O. Box 1070, Wellington.

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Radio Ethics

THE article that appears elsewhere on this page was suggested by a letter written to the New York *Herald Tribune* by James Montgomery Flagg. It was not a very serious letter, and ours is not exactly a solemn commentary. But both deal with a serious subject.

No one supposes that broadcasting can be a law to itself, make its own manners, and set its own standards of speech. The more listeners there are the more circumspect it must be, and the more attentive to the feelings, and even the prejudices, of the multitude. But it must do more than that. It must respect the feelings and prejudices of minorities and quite small groups. The multitude after all has no standards. It borrows its manners, its language, its restraints, from individuals. Hitler says heil, and heil it is. Shirley Temple wears curls, and at once every mother's darling goes curly too. So the first duty of everyone who educates or entertains us over the air is to remember that liberty is never absolute.

And even that is not the end of it. Broadcasting has abolished the limits of space. Although the barriers of language remain, radio is overcoming them so rapidly that every really important broadcaster speaks already to the whole world. If he speaks rudely or insolently he is a world danger; but even when he does not intend to be provocative he may create an international crisis by forgetting that the jokes of one country may be the red rags in another country that every political bull must charge.

It is a depressing thought that we can't share all our jokes and pass on all our inspirations. But the price of that privilege is one that we are all too poor to pay. It would require never-failing tolerance and an inexhaustible fund of humour, which *homo sapiens* notoriously does not possess.

TAKE CARE ON THE AIR!

Self-Censorship for U.S. Broadcasters

HOOTS of disapproval are sounding throughout the United States of America while the National Association of Broadcasters discusses a plan to impose censorship on itself.

If delegates approve, 95 per cent. of the commercial radio stations, including all the big networks, may ban, after September 24 of this year, irreverence, profanity, vulgarity, obscenity, sex, unkind ridicule, advertising of hard liquor, fortune telling, numerology, astrology, matrimonial agencies, race tip sheets, speculative finance, and real estate promotion.

The code is very similar to the censorship the film industry takes with a smile (sometimes slightly awry) from the Will Hays office.

Listeners are afraid that the American Dads and Daves will no longer be able to thrill them with "golly," "gosh," or "cripes"; or that they will have to talk about the limbs of a piano instead of its legs (or cut them off and set it "right smack on to the floor" as James Montgomery Flagg suggests in a letter to the "New York Herald Tribune.")

If all susceptibilities are to escape offence, Flagg suggests that the censorship be taken to its logical conclusion. The words "man" and "woman" should be banned. They suggest sex. The reference should be to persons or people, to keep radio nice. "Say 'two persons were married yesterday,' instead of 'John and Mary were married yesterday.' The word 'married' is rather indelicate. Yes, simply say, 'Two persons were yesterday.'"

Everyone with a secret hatred of Pekingese will have to call them dogs instead of upholstered cockroaches, in case their owners are offended, shut down their sets, and stop using Mudhole Face Lotion.

With everyone so touchy, Flagg believes it would be safer to bust up all the radios and tape everybody's mouth. Even then they'd make faces.

Broadcasters must not only bar all dialogue or statements which are obscene, sacrilegious, profane, or vulgar, especially as these appertain to sex; but they must also bar all dialogue or statements bordering on these sins.

Language used and subject matter discussed must be suitable for mixed social groups.

The Member of Parliament who said "H...ll" in the House of Representatives a few days ago (without censure from Mr. Speaker) would surely have burst the prim Yankee microphones. If the Victorian principles which Americans fear were applied in New Zealand we should have to do without our farm talks—in case they mentioned animal gen...tics; without our racing commentary—in case some reference to d...ms crept in; without our Rugby—in case someone's p...ts f...ll d...n; without our cooking recipes—in case they suggested mar...ge; and probably without our directors, managers, operators, technicians, and announcers—because they would undoubtedly all go mad in 48 hours.

For all their joking, and ours, Americans are watching the move in serious mood. They are trying, it would seem from newspapers and magazines, to laugh freedom back into place and censorship out of it. The principle of cutting indecency out of programmes meets with no opposition, but the principle of cutting humour and fun out of programmes meets with very strong opposition.

Or perhaps it is more correct to say that they oppose nothing specific but object rather to the principle that it may lie within the power of one individual or group of individuals to decide their manners, methods, and morals for them; to dictate decency to them; to rule right and wrong for them—when they have been telling themselves since George Washington that they have grown up and don't need bringing up any more.

Romantic Ballet

Many years ago in English theatres pantomimes were regular features. The old-time pantomime was all about merry Harlequin, dainty Columbine, and a woebegone Pierrot; and there was always a policeman, a red-hot poker, and a string of sausages which, in an obscure way, were necessary symbols. In "Carnaval," the delightful ballet to the music of Schumann, the spirit of the harlequinade has been captured, and all the characters (except the Policeman, and the ubiquitous poker and sausages) dance their roles to dream-like, whimsical melodies. When the Covent Garden Ballet was in New Zealand a few months ago, "Carnaval" was seen by many people. So to many balletomanes it

should be good news that this ballet will be presented from 2YC on Tuesday, August 15, at 9.5 p.m.

A Gentle General

Now that Napoleon has been disposed of in the "Man Through the Ages" series you will hear something from 4YA on Thursday, August 17, at 8 p.m., about the man who helped to dispose of him: the gentle general who said that next to a battle lost the greatest misery was a battle gained. "Napoleon" is to be followed this week by "The Battle of Waterloo," which stifled the power of one nation and paved the way for another to attempt the Napoleonic method again 100 years later.