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Listening While I Work (26)

By "Materfamilias"

LISTENING to programmes for children I have lately been struck by the difficulty that all those responsible for Children's Hours must have to face—i.e., what is a "child" in the radio sense of the word? Is it the pre-school toddler or the seven or eight-year-old, or does the term include all children to the age of 14? We are apt to talk glibly about "children," forgetting that each age is a stage by itself. The nine-year-old child is as far removed from the five-year-old as is a man of 20 from his father of 50, or nearly so. The child of 13 is correspondingly older than the child of nine. The school sessions have the great advantage of addressing certain standards. It is much easier to prepare talks or plays for special age groups or standards. For this reason I should think it would lighten the burden of the Children's Hours if each evening were devoted to a special age group.

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BUT apart from this age difficulty, all Children's Hour organisers seem to regard it as their task to combine entertainment with uplift and with intimacy. Intimacy seems to be an important point. How can children be made to feel, the policy seems to be, that this is real and that the people behind the microphone are vitally concerned with and for them? Whoever first thought of this started a tradition which it has been hard to kill. The beginnings—in Britain I believe—were with birthdays, and though birthdays had to be dropped, some of the birthday aroma still remains. To my mind this is vicious, because it was, from the first, based on hypocrisy. The child was led to believe that the radio fairies or some other such bogus beings were interested in his birthday, and this figment was backed up by the announcement of birthday good wishes and a present hidden in the cupboard under the stairs. Radio became a sort of super-Father Christmas-cum-fairies without the excuse of tradition. Fortunately, birthday greetings have disappeared, but a good deal of the bogus intimacy remains.

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THERE are other ways, too, in which this intimacy between studio and listener is fostered. Children are invited into the studio and all too frequently are invited also to perform. 2ZB has recently had a guest announcer competition and has a junior quizz as a regular feature. No doubt these do interest child listeners, especially if they know some of the other children in it. But is this the sort of listening that we want for our children? Surely they would be far better employed reading, carpentering, playing marbles, or flying kites, or even making apple-pie beds for their elders. "Intimacy listening" is in the same category as village gossip—without the spice. As for junior quizzes, I don't listen often, but I confess I am horrified at the way in which florins are handed out, not even for knowing, but for the most blatant guessing. A recent item went something like this:

Announcer: When Tasman came to New Zealand, some of his men were murdered at a bay which is called Massacre Bay. Since

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