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## HA HA! NO RADIO!

TEN years ago I happened to be in Dunedin for Capping Week. During a pause for recovery and quiet contemplation a visitor to the house at which I was staying asked peevishly if the radio had to be on all the time. "Oh, yes," said the daughter of the house, with wide and serious eyes. "If we switched it off we might miss something."

The visitor, a rather charming, cultured fellow, whose only vice was bagpipe playing, sat stunned for some minutes and then delivered a short sermon on the decadence of modern youth. That was fair enough; he was 20 and aiming to be a lawyer, with the ultimate ambition of a seat on the Bench, but what appals me now is that I took the part of the daughter of the house, holding strongly that something good was worth sitting through a lot of trash.

Obviously the Fates were listening.

"He's asked for it," said one of them, pausing briefly in her spinning while she bit off the thread of a Harbin dealer in yak tails. "Let him have it."

\* \* \*

SO for 10 years. I have never been far from radio (in the singular), radios (in the plural), community sets with earphones (bad), community sets with loudspeaker extensions (worse), large booming radios that set the table-ware rattling, and small sickly radios that never functioned when they were most wanted. For 10 years I have subjected my nerve endings to a constant barrage of mixed sound waves, ranging from morse to chamber music, from Traubel to trotting, from blow by blow at Madison Square Garden to bow by bow at a Boyd Neel Concert. I have deliberately woken at 6.0 a.m. to hear the news from Moscow in English, staggered from Leeds to the Oval through many a darksome night of the last Test series, cut good dinners in half to hear Ernest Bevin make a circus of a T.U.C. Conference, scribbled on the backs of envelopes times and wavelengths of worthwhile shortwave broadcasts, lost the envelopes, missed the broadcasts and lost my temper, copied with impeccable inaccuracy from the Swiss radio the names of the place-getters in the Winter Olympic ski-ing events as a good deed to a local ski club secretary (Knuss and Lindsstrom are seldom spelt as read), and in general, bound myself hand, foot and ear to a box with dim lights inside.

\* \* \*

THIS bondage brought me neither health, wealth, nor happiness; it debauched my taste, de-sensitised my ear and left a sour taste in my mouth. However, it wasn't all bad. Some moments of listening will not be forgotten. One was a BBC talk in the spring of 1940, by Mr. Duff Cooper. Most of the things I know about Mr. Duff Cooper, politically, I don't like, and such a talk at such a time could have been designed to help him into a job in Mr. Churchill's new government, but in spite of these things the talk was a beautiful masterpiece. It ranged



Written for "The Listener"  
by G. le F. Y.

over the countryside and ways of life of England and France, equally loved by the speaker, it breathed the serenity of action, now that the time of doubt and uncertainty was over and the course was clear. When it was finished all conflict was resolved and I was left with a feeling of peace and certainty.

The second moment was less peaceful. A BBC recording unit went out after the nightingale, and the nightingale was duly recorded, as it had been many times before, but this particular night happened to be the one set for the first thousand bomber raid on Essen. The nightingale didn't care. Pleasing song fragments bubbled out of it, while death passed overhead, growling, rumbling and filling the sky. Homo sapiens came off badly in that broadcast.

The third and last moment was the broadcast from Auckland of Peggy Knibb and the Boyd Neel Orchestra, when they gave a most perfect and exciting performance of Benjamin Britten's setting of Rimbaud's *Les Illuminations*. That kept me happily incoherent for days, so much so that I missed several news bulletins, a nine o'clock weather forecast, and part of a Saturday night sports summary.

\* \* \*

IN the end the Fates thought the joke had gone far enough. I went to stay with a large cheerful family named Stevenson. Take the radio? No. Bad manners and a nuisance to carry; besides, the Stevensons are sure to have a radio.

The first night at the Stevensons I was assaulted and battered by the younger members of the family, and it was only on climbing brokenly into bed that I remembered I hadn't heard the news, a book talk, a couple of things from Debussy's *Children's Corner Suite*, and a Discussion, all noted down as the task for that night, or the last

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