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## RADIO REVIEW

### Drama of Expediency

THE RADIO PLAY has often and perhaps too glibly been described as the newest art-form. This description has been generally accepted but I can't help feeling that it is rather premature. I doubt very much whether the radio play has attained sufficient awareness or profundity to deserve such high praise. It could more truthfully be described as the newest form of dramatic presentation. It is not so much a new art-form as a remoulding, and maybe a distortion, of an old one. It is, in a way, the drama of expediency. There is more than a hint of Mr. Wemmick. "Here's a radio—let's have a play," and for every original radio play, there are hundreds which are merely dramatised versions of novels, stories or stage plays which have all had their initial inspiration in a totally different medium.

Whatever the answer, the radio play's 20-odd years of existence have inspired a large number of books, and the latest to hand is Felix Felton's—which is entitled, simply, *The Radio Play*.\*

Felix Felton has had over 10 years' experience as a BBC producer, and what he has to say is condensed into a very readable and informative volume. He does not tell us how to write a radio play but discusses what happens once a play is placed in the hands of a producer. A great deal has already been said in similar publications, a lot is ordinary commonsense, but it is all written in the light of personal experience and comes together very nicely. One of the main conclusions arrived at after reading *The Radio Play* is that a producer who has a professional knowledge of music (as Felton has) has a far better chance of making his productions memorable and exciting than a man without such a qualification. Another is that ham or insincere acting is out of the question. As he says, "The microphone destroys bunk," and only actors who have an essential core of integrity can attain any sort of radio virtuosity. Descriptions of the technical assistance which is available for BBC producers make one aware of the difficulties experienced by our own Drama Department. The BBC has innumerable studios for different effects, the producer has a host of trained and gifted professional actors to choose from, there is time for adequate rehearsals, there is the control panel, and there are a number of top-flight musicians who can be employed to compose special scores for special productions.

New Zealand's Broadcasting House is still a dream of the future, and in the meantime the NZBS Drama Department has to cope

with certain make-shifts and inadequacies which must be frustrating. In Wellington there is one small studio, a limited rota of experienced players who are usually engaged in other employment during the day, there is no control panel for the producer, and I have not heard of one production where the music has been specially written, so that the regular presentations which come from this department should be given credit for the adequate standard of efficiency which has been achieved.

—Sycorax

### The Id Within Us

WHAT a large amount of American radio humour depends upon the studied insult! A master of the personal gibe, such as Alexander Woolcott, would have been at home in the Bing Crosby programme heard from 12B recently in which Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy were the guests. The ill-mannered manikin's habit of puncturing the vanities of his associates with unsubtle comments on toupees, waist-lines, faces and intellectual deficiencies seems to reveal something of a split personality in his creator. While Bergen is the polite, reserved, mild man, Charlie is the uninhibited guttersnipe. As I found myself listening for the hints of Charlie's voice in that of Bergen, and not the other way about, it occurred to me that that horrifying sequence in the British film, *Dead of Night*, about the malevolent dummy who comes to possess his ventriloquist might not be so divorced from reality as it had seemed. Anyhow, I am convinced that much of Charlie McCarthy's popularity comes from the fact that many mild men see in him themselves released from the pressure of conventional politeness, the cocking of the snook at social ritual, the articulation of unspoken personal insults that the censor represses daily in their souls.

### O Help, O. Henry!

THE need for drawing the line somewhere in radio dramatisations of short stories was shown in an ABC version, heard from 1YD recently, of what purported to be O. Henry's "The Last Leaf." The author's central characters are two girls, Sue and Johnsy (short for Joanna); in the "play" they become Sue and Johnny, husband and wife, with Sue, not Johnsy, suffering from pneumonia. Nor was this all. O. Henry's crisp tale, much of whose effect depends on its brevity, was spun out by preposterous dialogue between whimsical incarnations of Death and Hope, inventions of the script-writer, while the climax of the story—a simple paragraph in O. Henry



\*THE RADIO PLAY, by Felix Felton; Sylvan Press, London. English price, 10/6.