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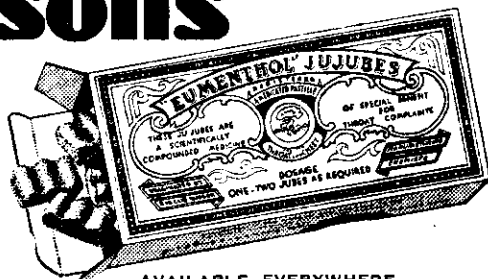
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NEW ZEALAND LISTENER

INCORPORATING N.Z. RADIO RECORD

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Fireside Entertainers

IT was reported from London recently that a BBC television announcer had received a threat of violence from an angry husband. The threat came in an anonymous letter; but the police were called in, inquiries were started, and the announcer—40 years old, six feet tall, and handsome—was said to be keeping a shotgun at home until the danger was over. "You have wrecked my life," wrote the unfortunate husband, "and I no longer have my wife's affections." He added, however, that he refused to give up his TV set; and although this decision was said to have been made "because of my small daughter," it seemed probable that his grief was still so far from despair that it could be eased by a change of programme.

The interesting part of the story is the situation of the announcer. "I have come," said the husband, "to hate your face, voice and everything about you." These words are an extreme expression of sentiments which, it is to be feared, disturb many minds and hearts in an age of transmitted entertainment. Some women are silly enough to become infatuated with film stars, television actors, and even radio announcers; and some men are silly enough to be jealous of rivals who can be little more than smiling ghosts. From such scenes of marital strife it is better, perhaps, to turn silently away. Anthropologists may speak, if they wish, of new idols which curiously attract the passions of the tribe; but a suspicion remains that fantasy begins at home, and that husbands and wives who quarrel over an announcer would manage their discords quite successfully if film and television stars were still unknown.

There are, however, other people who dislike public figures and performers for reasons which have nothing to do with marriage. They are irritated by faces seen too often in newspapers, by voices and mannerisms, or by speakers who come to be identified with

recurring clichés and platitudes. Opportunities for antipathy have been increased by broadcasting, for although a voice cannot be the complete man it reveals much of a speaker's personality. Not many people can afford to be radio "characters." At first they may be welcomed and praised by listeners. Here at last, it seems, is someone different—someone rugged or salty, with an apt turn of phrase or quotation, who can never be mistaken for anyone else. If the speaker is not heard too often, he may keep his popularity; but sometimes he becomes too familiar: intonation of voice and the little tricks of speech which were once delightful are now felt to be affectations, and are disliked.

With television, these hazards obviously become greater. It was found, when the cinema ceased to be silent, that many former stars could not adapt themselves to the talking screen. Similarly, a good broadcaster is not necessarily successful with the cameras. Nor is an actor the obvious man to replace him. "The television theatre," said a writer in the *BBC Quarterly*, "is a small room, the stage a shining rectangle of ten inches by eight inches, the audience like no other audience in the world (receiving its entertainment, as it might receive a breakfast tray, in its lap). To such an audience a strained and restless performance, a spasm of over-acting or over-emphasis, is as oddly disturbing as it would be if it had in fact taken place in the room itself. There is no medium so cruel to the performer and his material." And that, it seems, is the crux of the difficulty. A television screen brings performers into the home; they become intimate, not with an audience, but with a family. Obviously, the emotional reaction is personal rather than collective, and the scope for antipathy is greatly enlarged. The angry husband who threatened an announcer may not be the last of his kind to blunder across the margins of reality.

N.Z. LISTENER, SEPTEMBER 3, 1954.