Future Features in Broadcasting

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RADIO should neglect no opportunity of adopting the suggestions of the "highbrow." We should be inclined to favour rather than to suspect him, for he points the way to new things—something beyond that halfway to Paradise, which is peopled with those mild creatures whose admiration is only for the "safe" and "sound" and "tried" and "accepted" things of life.

While the cinema remained constant to the Woollier West, the happy ending, and the butter-slide, it remained also an insignificant amusement, of which people were furtively rather cynical. While radio keeps along the well-worn lines of ordinarily "good" programmes, it will remain an astonishing and occasionally useful toy.

The real advantage given to the films by their highbrow sponsors was that of improved technique, which came to be applied to average films of universal and fundamental appeal. On the same lines, radio must be influenced by the minority of its vocal enthusiasts to the continual perfection of its technique. The necessary experiments may lack general appeal, but that can temporarily be disregarded as a necessary evil. And the resulting good will be applied to the immense benefit of programmes, which in all other respects will keep their universal and fundamental appeal.

Then, as in the case of the cinema, the highbrow will have done his job, and justified his existence.

THE foregoing article was followed a little later by one from Walter T. Rault, in which the same theme was developed and carried a little further. Said Mr. Rault:—

The twentieth century has seen the birth of many new sciences and of two new arts—radio and the films. Both the arts are in their nonage; one has founded the greatest entertainment industry in the world, and the other bids fair to challenge it. The vastness and complexity of the industries have helped to obscure the immaturity of the arts. The older art—that of the kinema—has just reached the stage of adolescence, and it is passing through all the triumphs and troubles of that stage now. What lessons can be drawn from its experience to profit the younger art of radio, which is still learning to walk and trying valiantly to run?

In an article in last week's "Radio Times," "Astyanax" hailed the highbrow as the pioneer who should lead the way to better things, whilst the army of ordinary intelligent people followed after and occupied the ground floor that he had cleared. It is true that such is the whole tendency of modern art; but the trouble with an art that is already enshrined in so huge an industry is, how can the highbrow register on it? Materially, broadcasting has leapt to adult stature in five years; the intellectual pioneer has to work on an art some form of which is being produced for nation-wide audiences for eleven hours a day. Its engineers passed out of the experimental stage before its artists had a chance to realise their problem. But the same thing happened to the kinema. How has it been overcome?

The change in the attitude of the intelligent public towards the movies, which "Astyanax" described, is, I believe, only secondarily due to any improvement in the quality of the films. Showmanship and distribution have really effected the change.

A few years ago it might be said, with sufficient accuracy, that the better, the more original and unusual a film was, the more obscurely it appeared. Whilst the ordinary commercial kinemas filled their bills twice weekly with a succession of standard products whose differences could barely be discerned, pictures of real importance appeared unadvertised at houses that nobody knew. Those were the days when people went to the pictures to while away a wet evening—or because of the dark. They correspond to the days in which people listen to broadcast programmes because it is too wet to go out, because it is easier than reading, because they hope, without real certainty, that they will hear something good, or because they take a purely technical pleasure in hearing anything coming from a long way away.

In the country, and, to some extent, in the suburbs, exhibitors still work on those lines. But even there, the incursions of the good film—now that people know about it—are being felt. And the West End of London fairly bristles with films worth seeing. The ultimate reasons for the revolution are complex—the awakening of Hollywood to the film art of Europe being amongst the chief of them; but the immediate cause is the "exclusive run."

BROADCASTING is still in the state in which the movies were two years ago, before the advent of the exclusive run. The ordinary "good" programmes are fairly well classified, for the listener who wants to be selective, into such categories as symphony concerts, light music, stage plays, radio plays, educational talks, and so on. In the same way, the discriminating picture-goer could always know whether the films of the week were Westerns, spectacular, society, slap-stick, or bathing-belle. But the experiments still take their chance in the even flow of broadcasting that goes on all day and every day in the week.

The analogy to the "exclusive presentation" is the "feature programme." Just as big films are often bad, so will feature programmes often be bad, but experiments made in them will leave their mark. The really intelligent listener who cares critically for the art of broadcasting will get to know the men who are doing good work. When a feature programme is presented by a producer or an author whose previous programmes have interested him, he will see it announced beforehand, he will note the date as the theatre-goer notes a first night; he will no more miss it than I would miss the first showing of a new Chaplin film. The Press will report its progress as it reported progress in the Cricklewood Studios when "Shooting Stars" was being made, and the critics will review it as "Sunrise" was reviewed. It will be as impossible for anyone who wanted to hear it to miss hearing it as it was for anyone who wanted to see it to miss seeing "Ben Hur." Amongst the millions of listeners (many of them probably switched on to the alternative programme on safe conventional lines), the men responsible for the experiment will find their audience of pioneers.

Broadcasting has yet to find its "big minds"—creative artists whose work will bring to the microphone as much originality of technique and imagination as big minds are bringing to the films. It should not take them from the stage. The analogy still holds good. The finest actors and producers of movieland learned their art under movie conditions; they were not transplanted from an older art. Similarly, those who are to build the future of broadcasting technique must be those who have gained experience of their medium, who live, breathe, and think in it only. Such names will mean nothing to the theatre-goer and the film enthusiast. But they will stand for something with the wireless listener. Then the conscious art of broadcasting will have arrived.

RADIO IN FILMS

INSTRUCTIVE KINEMATOGRAPHY.

At a recent meeting in Melbourne the members of the Wireless Institute of Australia (Victorian Division) were shown two educational films prepared by the General Electric Co. One showed by means of pictorial diagrams the way the current flows and the action set up in a transmitting or receiving set of standard design. By means of dots and arrow-heads, which "moved" along through the coils, condensers, valves, etc., the action is built up step by step, the dots representing the electronic flow.

The grid action of the valve was quite novel, the grid being represented as a shutter or a Venetian blind which, by its opening and closing controlled the flow of electrons from the filament to the plate.

Movement of Electrons.

The second film was designed to explain simply the theoretical structure of an atom of matter, and the movement of the electrons round the central nucleus of any atom of matter was shown very clearly, as well as the arrangement and rearrangement when two elementary atoms are combined.

The "screening" was arranged for by Mr. G. H. Neve, of the General Electric Co., who also exhibited to the meeting some new apparatus of recent design, with which he discussed the tendency in modern receiving equipment.

AUSTRALIAN LISTENERS

NEARLY 400,000 TOTAL.

According to the latest figures supplied by the Commonwealth Postmaster-General's Department, Victoria is still in the ascendency and has more wireless receiving licenses than the whole of the other States of the Commonwealth together. The following were the respective numbers of licenses in force in the States of Australia at the end of March:—

Victoria	136,481
Rest of Australia ..	126,859
New South Wales .	75,869
Queensland	24,920
South Australia ...	19,452
West Australia	3,780
Tasmania	2,838
Grand total	390,199

The Victorian total is estimated to be proportionately the world's record, being equal to approximately 78 licenses to every one thousand of the population.

The 1928 Paris's Latin Quarter's "vie de Boheme" contrasts violently with that of Henri Murger's day. Students are no longer content with an attic and a precarious existence, and a number of them at the Sorbonne, less well-to-do than others, have found an outlet for their technical knowledge and energies in making wireless receivers de luxe and finding a good sale for them. Their organisation is called Radio-University, and their products are available at an economic price because there is no middleman. The young engineering students occupy themselves with the mysteries inside the set, while the art cabinets are made by those at the Decorative Arts School.

RADIO AND WEATHER

IS THERE SOME RELATION?

A United States Associated Press message from London, dated March 10, states:—"Does radio affect the weather?" is a question around which some controversy has arisen. The discussion came after a suggestion of the Matlock Improvement Association that the effect of radio on the weather should receive a practical test by the cessation of broadcasting for a month.

Some meteorological experts have described the theory as "absurd" and "ridiculous."

Professor A. M. Low, noted British scientist, says:

"No scientist has the right to dismiss the question of radio interference with climatic conditions as of no consequence. When one deals with a subject like this one must talk with care.

Influence Conceivable.

"Who would have thought a few years ago that an electric current passing through glass globes in England would enable a voice to be heard in Australia? Now we have accepted this as a fact, why should it be 'ridiculous' to suppose that the amount of electricity launched into the air by wireless stations should have some effect on the atmosphere?

"There is no need to go to extremes and allege that radio on its own could cause rain, wind or storms, but it is not inconceivable that the electricity used in broadcasting may play a contributory part toward breaking up the weather.

Effect on Health Cited.

"It is as absurd to say that the announcer's voice from 2LO causes rain as it is precipitately to dismiss the theory as beneath discussion, and assert that electricity cannot affect the weather. After all, electricity and light in certain forms have been proved to have an effect on people's health, and wheat has been assisted in its growth by artificial light.

"Therefore, there is no reason why the effect of wireless on the atmosphere should not be the subject of careful investigation. Conditions and other contributory causes would have to be studied over an extremely long period."

ETHER CONGESTION

NEW YORK AND CHICAGO.

In New York City itself there are twenty-three broadcast stations. A United States Associated Press message from New York, dated March 10, says: "Reception congestion that confronts no other listening section with such an avalanche of music and speech, has brought to the radio public of this metropolitan area a problem that bids fair to be a sticker. Stations in New York are nearly as numerous as taxicabs on Broadway and are just as difficult to dodge.

"Chicago (with 38 broadcast stations) often brags of the number of its transmitting stations, but the New Yorker has very little to say in that respect. He simply tunes in and forgets the rest of the radios in United States for the simple reason there is nothing else to do."

A new type of valve has been invented by H. J. Round, England, which has the grid element wound outside the valve, which resembles a cotton reel.