

The Curse of Radio— Its Simplicity

*If People Had to Learn to Use Radio They
Would Appreciate it More*

Although the license figures in New Zealand are increasing rapidly there is no doubt that, after making due allowance for all those with "axes to grind" in one way or another, there are a considerable number of listeners who are genuinely dissatisfied with the programmes provided by the Broadcasting Board. In Australia, the position is even worse; there the license figures are increasing very slowly, and every year there are from 50,000 to 80,000 licenses cancelled in the Commonwealth. In the following article, written by F. W. L. Esch in the "Australian Women's Weekly," a novel but quite legitimate reason is suggested for the numbers of dissatisfied listeners.

NOBODY can deny that there are a large number of dissatisfied listeners. You meet them every day, and in every kind of home.

Hitherto it has always been the broadcasting stations which have been wrong, but on this occasion the X-ray of criticism is to be directed at the listeners.

There are two ends to radio—the broadcasting end and the listening end, and though a great deal has been written and said about broadcasting, no attention so far has been paid to listening.

The curse of radio is its simplicity. If people had to learn how to use it they would appreciate its benefits more; but a switch and a twist is all that is necessary to conjure the genii of the ether, and such familiarity leads to abuses, with the inevitable result—dissatisfied listeners.

In many ways a wireless set is more difficult to use properly than a motor-car. It will be the beginning of a new era in wireless when trade organisations wake up to this fact and combine the selling of sets with an education in how to get the best out of them.

To the happy, innocent person who has just purchased a radio set for the first time, the acquisition of this wonder of science takes the shape of a veritable gift from the gods, unless the new owner has already been made cynical by his friends.

Watch how he places the cabinet in the best position in the living-room. His wife adorns it with flowers as though it were a private altar. For a few weeks the family worships in awe before this shrine which talks and sings and sends forth music; but, as time passes, so do they grow used to the wonder, and then they begin to find fault with the programmes. This, of course, is a well-known human trait; wonder and appreciation first; criticism and abuse next.

It would be the same if science arranged a link-up, through some new spiritualistic discovery, with the great men and women of history who have passed into the unknown. We should all be amazed and delighted for a few weeks; then some of us would begin to find fault with

these psychic broadcast arrangements. Listeners would complain of the irritating voices of some of the celebrities. A talk by Plato would be dubbed too highbrow; Aristotle would be condemned as a bore. Even Beethoven conducting a spirit orchestra, or Mendelssohn a spirit choir, would not be beyond the criticism of the listener.

The answer to the whole problem is that the most perfect programme will not satisfy the imperfect listener.

The imperfect listener is the one who expects too much of a wireless set and tunes in too often. There are few things in life that one does not get tired of if one has too much of them. Wireless is not one of these exceptions.

Reviewing some of the main imperfections in the technique of listening, we must consider an entirely erroneous notion about music, namely, that the more you have of it the better you like it.

That ancient and pathetic little jingle—

"Rings on her fingers . . . bells on her toes,

She shall have music wherever she goes, . . ."

was a forecast of the conditions under which many people try to live to-day, with their wireless sets turned on from morning till night.

Music under these circumstances becomes just a noise and a nuisance, and even though the owner of the set may not admit it, the constant noise is bad for the nerves. There is another aspect which, though only a theory, is worthy of consideration. Science admits that certain types of music may stimulate various glands in different degrees. Martial music, for instance, is thought to stimulate the adrenal

cortex and thyroid glands, causing emotions of courage and a feeling of energy, while gentle, soothing chamber music is thought to stimulate the auto-pituitary and the adrenal medulla to produce the opposite effects.

Whether this theory is true or not, we all know that music does stimulate the emotions, and we can only wonder at the emotional effect of the mixture of types of music heard over the air. (Ctd. on p. 50.)

