

Margaret Macpherson Asks Are We Really Good Listeners?

IT is the height of bad manners to look a gift horse in the mouth or to question the sincerity of a compliment—I know that. But, really, so many grand claims are made for women nowadays that we must either substantiate some of them or get our heads hopelessly turned. A woman who is not an arrant silly does not swallow butter indiscriminately. If a man tells her she is beautiful she knows, because her mirror has told her, whether he pulling her leg or not. If she is declared to be "so intelligent" she takes stock of her mental equipment to see if the charge is well founded. Any other procedure would make one into a lunatic or a laughing-stock in a very short time.

Last week the editor of the "Radio Record" threw a charming bouquet to the woman listener. We learned from his leading article that women are "the best listeners—the most receptive, the most attentive, the most appreciative and, in the best sense, the most critical." Now, if the editor had been trying to sell us something, or if he were standing for Parliament, we would dismiss his kind words as "hoovey," otherwise known as "a little bit of sugar for the bird." But as he has nothing to gain by these remarks which do not redound to the credit of his own sex, let us look into them and see if they are well based.

Why should women be better listeners than men? For one thing, they listen more and oftener. They live, generally speaking, comparatively secluded lives, and the radio is very often their only companion.

The wide difference between women and men is, to my mind, nothing short of deplorable. People do not usually realise it, because they are used to it. Women think differently from men, they act differently, and they look different. You may say, "Well, that is only right and proper." But is it? Are we sure that it is right or proper? I think it is wrong and improper. You see, there needs to be great likeness between the sexes in order to foster true companionship. The tiger and the tigress are true companions. They think alike and act alike and look alike.

But only in rare cases are men and women true companions. And as for appearance, they do not even look like the same species of animal. Just scan that wedding group photo on your mantelpiece, and you will see what I mean. The men look like black beetles; the women look like flowers. If a tiger saw that bride and bridegroom, he would find it hard to believe that they are the male and female of the same species. But the difference is artificial. Undress them—and they look very much more alike. Artificial differences have been made between men and women, and I claim that this is bad for the whole race. In the Victorian era the true lady lay on a sofa all day, delicate, gentle, swooning upon every unusual occasion. (If she did

not swoon upon receiving a proposal of marriage, then she was *no* lady.) Her husband, on the other hand, went forth into the big bad world and wrestled with it. Their lives were not merely unlike; they were opposite. Except when they met, they did not even speak the same language. He talked of horses, music-halls, bets, and drinks, for a three-bottle man was the true manly man. He punctuated his sentences with strange and fearful oaths, such as "Strike me purple and lay me bleeding, sir, if I did not catch a fish the size of, etc., etc." He drank port; she drank weak tea. He swore; she swooned. He strode manfully along in trousers, while she tripped and minced with difficulty in eight petticoats and a bustle. Never were two creatures so unlike. (How different the tiger and tigress leaping tautly along, side by side, equal in strength, freedom and beauty.)

You see what I mean?

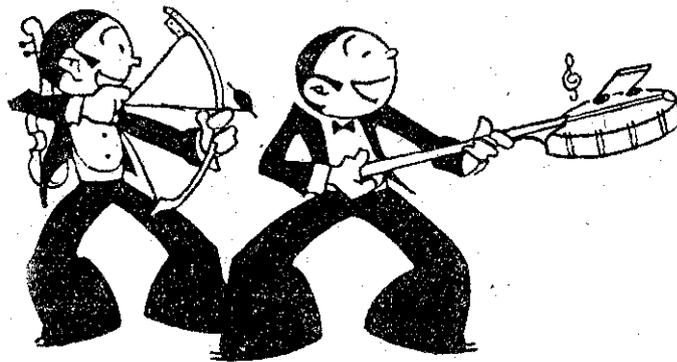
Gradually the sexes are growing together again—for the good of all humanity. In two countries this is especially so—in Soviet Russia and in New Zealand men and women are beginning to work together, play together, think together and alike. Only beginning, mark you. The gap is far from being closed

yet. Our editor's remark about women as listeners shows this.

Why does woman's secluded life make her a good listener? Well, she is a *practised* listener, and practice is what makes perfection. Listening to a piece of music is like taking a ride in a fast-moving car. All sorts of beauties flash past; one hardly is able to grasp them the first time. But if one travels the same road often, the landscape reveals itself more to the seeing eye every time. So with a

musical composition. The subtleties of Bach, Beethoven, Liszt, Chopin, are not to be described in the first hearing. But women listen day by day. They are soon convinced of the comparative emptiness of the "light musical programmes"; they gradually become aware of the eternal beauties in the works of the great masters. They develop a fine musical culture which is denied to their husbands who are working away all day and who only hear the "popular" and often rubbishy programmes of the evening. The classics do not appeal to everybody, chiefly because they are not sufficiently often heard. They have to be heard repeatedly to be understood. Their beauty is not of the superficial and obvious type; it requires repetition and attention, and the study which the woman listener consciously or subconsciously gives day by day.

Now, it is no joy to me to find that women are becoming more cultured than men. I want to see that difference abolished. I want to see the sexes grow together again. What is the cure for the trouble? It may be that the great masters' compositions should be given more prominence in our evening programmes and that the necessary repetition (Continued at foot next page.)



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