

EDUCATING UNCLE EDGAR

(Written by MARY KNIGHT for the "Radio Times,"
London.)

JOHN and I have pretty similar tastes in wireless programmes, and since I can have my choice all day, if there is any difference I usually agree with him in the evening. But when Uncle Edgar came to stay, all this was changed. He hasn't got a wireless set, and was so genuinely delighted with ours that we gave in to him and let him select every programme—even when he developed what we felt was an unhealthy taste for "difficult" talks and symphony concerts. For a time we couldn't call our set our own.

One Friday, when John brought home "The Radio Times," instead of putting it down beside the set as usual, he carried it upstairs with him. Afterwards he explained: "I don't want him to get hold of it, and be reminded of that talk next Wednesday. There's a variety show with that ventriloquist fellow—we must hear him again!—and he's on at the same time as those talks Uncle Edgar's so fond of. We shouldn't get a chance if he was at home here. See if we could arrange to have him asked out that evening." "But one of us will have to go with him," I said. "We'll toss for it," said John. "Tails," I said hopefully. But it was heads. "Very well," said John, with more satisfaction in his tone than was decent, "you try and fix up with the Knoxes or someone, and we won't let him see next week's programmes until the engagement's made."

The Knoxes said they would be very pleased if we would come round—they were only sorry John would not be able to come too. But when Uncle Edgar heard of the arrangement he became really distressed. "My dear, I'm very sorry, but if it could be any evening but Wednesday—on that evening there is the last of those talks I've been hearing, and I should be greatly disappointed to miss it. Could not you and John go, and leave me at home?"

John was not pleased. "There's nothing for it," he said, "but to take a chill and have the loudspeaker brought up to the bedroom. An invalid would have to have a light programme."

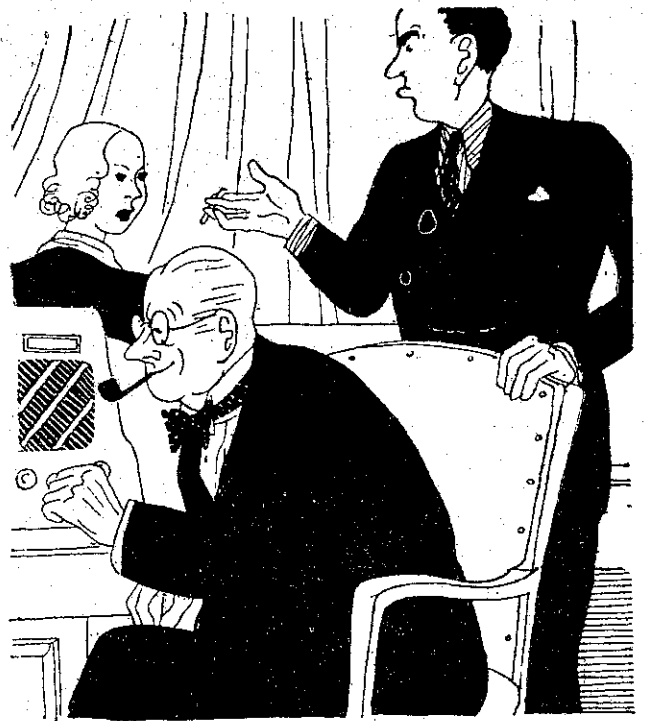
On the Wednesday John came limping up from the station hardly able to stand: he had slipped and twisted his foot, he said, and he thought he had sprained his ankle. At first I did not think it was genuine; but when he, poor thing, had got upstairs with the greatest difficulty and his boot had been removed there was no room for doubt. We did not need the doctor's visit to tell us that rest in bed was absolutely necessary.

It was not until applications of lotion had eased the pain that John suddenly remarked that he was certainly entitled to the variety now! There could be no doubt of this; the loudspeaker was attached, and with great satisfaction John selected his programme for the evening—a military band concert from National, followed by the variety from Regional.

I broke it to Uncle Edgar as gently as I could. I tried to persuade him that he would enjoy the variety. "But, my dear, I don't think I could listen to one of those entertainments. I have never heard anything of the sort, and I don't think I could sit through it. I understand there is a great deal of nonsense, and not a little vulgarity to put up with." While John was enjoying the military band upstairs, Uncle Edgar kept walking up and down the room, evidently growing more and more uneasy. At last he said: "My dear, you will think me a very troublesome, fussy old man, but I do not think I can sit through the variety entertainment. Do you think your friends would excuse my changing my mind, and allow me to go round to them this evening after all?"

It was very awkward; Mary was out, and I didn't really like to leave John, but Uncle Edgar seemed so very distressed.

"Of course we'll go out," I said. "We'll go round to the Carruthers's, they're glad to see us at any time. I'll



just make sure John's got everything he wants, and, if he's all right, we'll go out till his variety is over." John was surprised, but quite pleased that we should go.

Kind Mr. Carruthers welcomed us warmly. "Very glad to see you, very glad indeed—come away in. You've come just at the right time to enjoy this variety entertainment with us. We may not be very amusing folks ourselves, but we can always give our visitors a good time with the wireless. You sit there, sir, you'll hear well there. Now then, let's go straight over!"

I never knew Uncle Edgar to laugh so much. He sat with his spectacles in his hand wiping his eyes and shaking with laughter. It was great fun, and so good to think of John enjoying it all too. Uncle Edgar was surprised and delighted. He chatted about the performance all the way home. I felt it had all turned out very well indeed, until just as we reached the house a dreadful recollection came to me. I had left John enjoying the concert from National with no one to switch him over to Regional for the variety! He would have to have the talk or nothing, for I had not even left him a book or a paper to amuse himself with!

I hurried upstairs, followed by Uncle Edgar, who seemed only to want to talk about the entertainment he had so much enjoyed. Before I could say anything, Uncle Edgar began. "My dear boy, I've been quite surprised. I've heard the variety and I have had a most entertaining time." "So have I," said John. "You left me on National, and I couldn't get the variety, so I heard the talk—it wasn't half bad, that chap was quite interesting! Uncle Edgar, do you remember, in the first talk, what did he say about—?" I hurried downstairs to make some coffee.

When I came up with it they had just finished discussing the talk, and Uncle Edgar was giving a very good imitation of the ventriloquist!

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