

Radio Plays and the Talking Pictures



PERHAPS because it lacks the mathematical exactitude of a mechanical process, the technique of an art is usually left to those who practise it. Most of us know something of how a kinema works, or how a radio valve functions. But until we see a film, or hear a broadcast in which the story or the acting "creaks" in its efforts to impress, it may not dawn on us that technique is more than a "high-brow's" chimera.

The youngest technique at present is that of the talking film. To some may seem that the "talkies" are merely the result of superimposing radio on the silent picture. In the case of the first talking films, this idea might be said to be partly true.

Graduating from a Novelty.

BUT in order to graduate from a novelty to a form of art, and to justify its existence when the newness has worn off, the talking picture is nowadays developing a special technique of its own—and one which is becoming more and more foreign to broadcasting.

It is sometimes said that the radio play is first cousin to the film. But by "film" is meant the silent picture. A swift succession of impressions, seen or heard, a rapid transition from one location to another, characterisation through a single medium which in the case of the film is visual expression and in the case of radio, sound—all these things are common characteristics both of the silent screen and the microphone.

The talking pictures on the other hand have much more in common with the theatre. In time, relationship may

WITH the advent of talking-films in the motion-picture world, and with the possible adoption within a few years of television as an aid to broadcasting, it may appear to many that these two modern forms of entertainment will ultimately merge into one coincident art, with an identical technique. This is not so. The reverse, if anything, is taking place, and the following article reveals the gradually widening difference between the technique required for each art.

become so close that, with the development of stereoscopy and improved elocution, the former will be almost indistinguishable from the latter. "Almost," but not quite, since the diffusion of that mysterious quality known as the "human element" seems to be limited to the stage, and perhaps, to radio.

It may be argued that, since the talking picture has photography at its service, there is nothing to prevent its using that variety of setting which is found in broadcasting, and in the silent film. And it is true, moreover, that the out-of-doors recording of voices has been more or less satisfactorily achieved.

But just as some authorities maintain that the only way to get the best out of Shakespeare is to play him before a patternless curtain, in order that nothing visible detracts from the beauty of the spoken word, so it is possible that exquisite photography in a sound-film may detract from the dialogue.

If this is the case (and it seems likely, unless there arises some author who can write "lines" more compelling than the natural pictorial backgrounds seen in certain films) the producer, in his wisdom, will confine his attention to interiors—and not too magnificent ones at that.

THIS means that sooner or later a still greater difference between the of the theatre, a rest at the end of

talking film and the radio play may appear. The act-division system will operate in the former, not as a convention, but as a necessity.

In the radio play the division of a story into acts is often not only unnecessary, but dangerous to its continuity. It can be as irritating as when, in the old days at the kinema, patrons were informed in the midst of some exciting or moving episode, that "Part Five Follow Immediately." Even though a smart operator could sometimes carry out the promise of the last word in that message, the delay was always dangerous to appreciation.

But with the talking film, breaks of some kind may prove essential rather than harmful to enjoyment. A limitation of scene throws too much strain on one's listening powers. Even a broadcast play is not all listening. The mind sees as many scenes as the author and producer conjure up, and this mental process balances the work of the ears. This compensatory balance is not present to the same extent in the talking film.

Desirable Rest.

THERE being little variation of scene, the viewing of a talking picture becomes a matter of hearing most of the time, and, as in the case

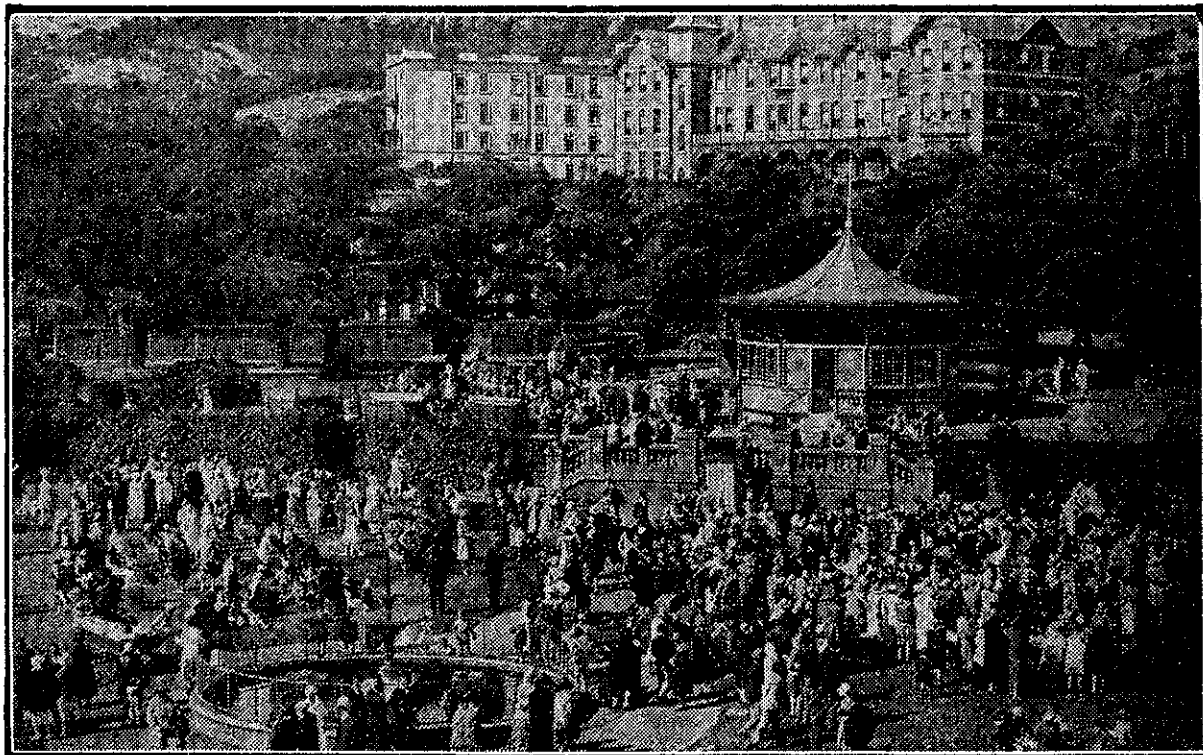
forty or so strenuous minutes becomes very desirable.

It may even be that the technique of the talkies will, in the end, provide for more act-divisions than that of the stage play—and at shorter intervals of time. For in addition to demanding conscious listening attention it further requires, at least at present, that its patrons focus that attention on one spot.

The voices of the film-players do not come from their lips. The ears and eyes of the persons watching are constantly being "pulled into line" as it were by means of efforts which are none the less real in that they are made unconsciously. In the broadcasting of a play this does not happen, since the eye has no work to do, and all the "seeing" is performed by the "mind's eye," which can work in harmony with the ear.

It may appear from what has been said that talking pictures constitute a rather formidable way of enjoying oneself. The object in view, however, has merely been to indicate that they possess a technique which, like that of many other arts, is a bigger thing than is often realised.

What makes a film or a play or a broadcast enjoyable? In nine cases out of ten it is the hidden but intelligent use of a good technique. An interesting story will give pleasure, but the writer knows that there is a technique of story-writing to be mastered before that pleasure can become an accomplished fact. And after the story comes the production with its same need of technique. The acting, setting, even the advertising require it, too, in no uncertain degree.



A scene at the Wellington Public Hospital grounds on Saturday last, when a fete was organised to provide funds to purchase radio equipment for hospital patients.