

Radio as Entertainment

By ARMSTRONG PERRY

FROM the time when we find our big toe and stick it in our mouth so that it may entertain us through the sense of taste while waiting for the time when it will provide us transportation, we all like to be amused.

The motion picture took and held our fancy because it brought to us a form of entertainment which, while right at our doors and within the reach of our pocketbooks, nevertheless carried us to distant, imaginary lands far from the cares that we were trying to escape. The movies even save us the trouble of thinking, which is more or less necessary, if one is to read. All we need to do is to look and the actors do the rest.

Radio, reaching us through our ears and promising in the not very far away future to spread distant scenes before us also, goes a step farther and for no expense at all, except a moderate first investment and a small upkeep, makes it possible to enjoy a show in night clothes, if we wish, instead of in evening clothes.

Will it last? Why not? Didn't the Apostle Paul twit the Athenians of always wanting to hear something new? Have not the folks of Athens, Ohio, and Athens, Pennsylvania, just as much curiosity as those who dwelt in ancient Greece? If you do not think so, go there.

Radio is primarily, of course, but a means of communication. No means of communication has as yet perished from the earth after it was once discovered. Men still carve messages on stone, as may be seen in any well-developed cemetery. They write them on skins, even on their own skins as the beauty spot and the tattooing parlor attest. Boy Scouts make marks on the ground and bend twigs to show the trail, though lead pencils have long been a household utility. Mothers blow horns to call their tardy sons home from the swimming hole. The printing press, the typewriter, the phonograph, the mailplane and the telegraph and telephone systems have but supplemented and increased the range of the more primitive methods for the exchange of thought and command. Is there any reason to believe that America will give up radio?

Radio, to look at the matter from the transmitting end, has supplied the actor with his heart's desire, an audience that can be increased *ad infinitum* and that cannot boo or hiss or throw turnips. The postal card applause is not quite as satisfying as the "hand" because longer delayed, but coming from more towns than there are chairs in the largest theatre it has a thrill so powerful that for the moment he forgets the problem of providing a box office and collecting the admission fees. Radio has given the politician what he has always wanted, an audience to which he can talk and talk and talk and which never heckles. To the minister it has brought the ineffable charm of wafting a spiritual message through a spiritual medium with the feeling that perhaps even the angels hear and approve his summons to a sinful world to put its house in order and prepare for the life to come. And, to return to the receiving end, it has given us all the chance to hang up on any one of them without in the least disturbing his flow of oratory, as we might if we stalked up the middle aisle. Are such advantages to be lightly cast aside?

There are certain things that militate

against radio as a home entertainer and a rival of the motion picture. We feel somewhat dazed at our first contact with it when a superior acting radio amateur of seventeen explains to us that radio frequency amplification is the coming thing because the ratio of amplification is as great on weak as on strong signals, whereas in audio frequency amplification, meaning amplification after the incoming current has passed through the detector, the stronger the signal the stronger the amplification. What we wanted to know was whether we could get the fashion talks from Wanamaker's with a mahogany outfit. And after the thing is finally installed and we tune in, we get the current price of hogs in Kansas City when we want the household hints.

The male of the species sometimes takes the joy out of the radio evening at home by listening raptly for half an hour while the rest of the family look expectantly on, and then reporting: "Gee, I just got an act of a corking Broadway show but it was not coming strong enough to work the loud speaker!"

Batteries, like bank accounts, run low when to all external appearances they should be able to stand a strain. Vacuum tubes look so tantalizingly like the light bulb needed for the cellar stairs, but cost so scandalously

when a single contact with the socket burns out the filament. The *dah d'dah d'dah* of a code station breaks into the "Song of India," or two songs get tangled like a pair of women pulling hair, on the evening when we are entertaining the Wednesday Club. And yet, radio lures us on, for there is always something new, and something new, be it what it may, is always interesting.

So far we have been passive listeners. We have taken the entertainment as it came, good, bad, or worse, just as we pull the prizes from the grab bag at the church festival. Like as not some of us have failed even to send the requested post card telling that we heard the show and liked it and that next time we would like so and so. In the future, I believe, we will have more to say about the programs. It took some time to get up courage to tell the moving picture manager whether we liked the feature or not. We used to leave him very much in the dark except when he was adept at reading the expressions on the faces of departing patrons or reached conclusions by comparing the box office receipts for certain pictures. When we took him into our confidence the quality of the photoplays began to improve and today the program of a neighborhood house is as accurately fitted to its clientele as their shoes are to their feet.

So it will be with radio. There will be concerts such as we really want to hear, college courses for the boy who could not go as far as the university, business information in condensed form so that dad will not have to ruin his eyes and fill all his home time with reading. All will be systematized and on time like the visits of the postman. Probably we shall have individual receiving sets for the different members of the family, so each can hear what he wishes. They will be cheaper and more efficient than they are now, and simpler to operate.

What will become of the movies and of the theatres? is asked. Will radio take their place?

Have movies taken the place of reading? See the records of the best sellers, or look at the piled-up newsstands. No new system of communication has ever failed to stimulate the desire for more intercourse. The command "Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together" may have been needed in religious circles, but it is not in matters of entertainment. The larger part of every audience that greets a singer is composed of those who heard him first from a phonograph record. The moving picture draws, but the appearance of the actress in person gets the record crowd. Radio, bringing directly into the home the voices of stage and screen favorites, concert stars and famous lecturers, will increase the number of their admirers and insure full houses wherever they appear.

Radio will not take the place of the telegraph or the telephone, the newspaper or the magazine, the theatre or the moving picture show. It is just one more marvel of modern science that enriches our lives and fills with pleasant, useful entertainment, the time that once was spent in monotonous toil and the worries that beset a lonely mind.

IN this installment Mr. Perry makes some excellent suggestions. He compares the radio entertainment to the early movies, where we had to take what they gave us, and not what we wanted. Mr. Perry believes that in the future we shall have more to say about the programs that are being broadcasted than we have now.

An important thing that broadcasting stations should do at the present time is to ascertain the name of every radio listener within a radius of 25 miles. This is not such a difficult undertaking as might be imagined. Then, by sending each one of these listening stations a dozen or more stamped return postal cards, the listeners will be in a position to tell the broadcasting stations their likes and dislikes. In this manner broadcasting stations would no doubt soon be in a position to please the great majority.—EDITOR.

NATIONAL RADIO WEEK

December 23d to December 30th, inclusive, is to be the first National Radio Week, suggested originally by Mr. Roland B. Hennessy of New York City. During that week every radio enthusiast should try to think, talk, dream and shout nothing else but Radio.

The object is to acquaint the public at large with Radio.

"Radio News" has prepared a beautiful colored post card which we shall be glad to send to every one who asks, in any reasonable quantities. This postal card, the picture of which will be published in the next issue of "Radio News," is to be sent to all your friends who are as yet not interested in Radio, inviting them to come and see your station, or any first-class station of which you know.

This is a preliminary announcement, and we shall have more to say about National Radio Week in the January issue.—EDITOR.