

lead is an invaluable aid in becoming responsible, dependable, and alert to the needs of a situation—in short, a good citizen.

Grown-ups can help children acquire character by remembering that one act does not condemn a child, that he may rise from temporary defeat a stronger individual, that he may learn by his mistakes. Confidence in the child, and again confidence, and yet more confidence is needed for successful guidance in this most difficult art. No sitting-in-judgment and no laying-out-the-culprit should be permitted. Admission of mistakes—yes; pointing out needs—certainly; but no condemnation. "I may do the wrong things," said a child of three, "but I'm the right girl." And so are they all, the right girls and boys.

EDNA DEAN BAKER

### IS RADIO DRAMA SIGNIFICANT?

**W**HAT significance has radio drama in our culture? The program in dramatic form ranks second in frequency of those broadcast by American radio stations, music, popular and serious, ranking first. The popularity of soap serials and theater hours indicates the widespread appeal of this form as entertainment. Indeed both educational and commercial broadcasters have accepted wholeheartedly the notion that ideas and sales messages can be conveyed best when cast in play form. What attitude is the discriminating listener to take toward this type of program? Is he to deplore this as a pandering to the debased taste of the mass public?

Of course, all programs in dramatic form cannot be lumped together for praise or blame. They vary tremendously from one to another in form itself. Some, for example, are serials which follow a stereotyped pattern. They begin each episode by

extricating the characters from a crisis set up in the previous program and carry them steadily onward to another crisis at the end of the episode. To the listener who follows breathlessly from day to day, life appears to be a precarious existence amidst a succession of horrible incidents. On the other hand, another series consists of individual plays adapted for radio, each following more or less the accepted conventions of drama. The continuity from one program to another is provided by the master of ceremonies, who introduces the guest stars and works in a testimonial for the advertised product.

Again, programs are vastly different in the significance of their content. One drama may plunge the listener into a harrowing world of make-believe, taking him as far as possible from the realities of his everyday existence. Another may make him aware of the poverty in the next block and its significance to the welfare of his community. The content may promote escape, or it may develop a heightened sensitivity to social, economic, and political problems.

The purposes for which radio dramas are broadcast also differ greatly from one program to another. An educational broadcaster, intent on "getting over" to school children important information, may put these facts into conversational form, believing that thus the facts will be better remembered. Another may be more concerned with the shaping of attitudes and utilize drama because in its semblance of reality it catches up its listeners so that they respond emotionally as well as intellectually. An advertiser may be concerned only that he hold his listeners steadily from day to day so that his sales messages may be heard. The most fantastic melodrama may be utilized like a drug, so that the listeners will be unable to "leave it alone." Another merchant may take a long-time view and seek, over a period of several years, to build good will for his product by presenting high-type dramatic entertainment in the be-

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lief that discriminating listeners to such programs can be developed and that their number can be increased.

No, radio drama cannot be condemned because it has been exploited, nor should it be lauded on the basis of the small minority of programs of high quality. Instead, the discriminating listener will be specific in his criticism and in his praise. But he will do more than that. He will seek, also, to obtain more dramatic programs which in content, form, and purpose have social and artistic significance, and will lend his efforts to enlarging the number of discriminating listeners. It is particularly important that this group become vocal now. Broadcasters are experimenting with dramatic programs written for the critical minority. The response to such efforts will determine pretty largely which way the broadcasters will go.

Advertisers and broadcasters are convinced that there is a large and appreciative audience for mediocrity as represented by the host of fifteen-minute serials. The public reaction to superior programs is not so clear. The commercial dramatic hours, such as *Cavalcade of America* and the *Lux Radio Theater*, do have a large following which is held pretty steadily from week to week. The more experimental series, however, such as the *Columbia Workshop* and the *Mercury Theater*, have not as yet built up large mass audiences. One reason for this is that the individual broadcasting stations cannot be depended upon to carry these programs consistently. It is almost impossible this year to receive the *Columbia Workshop* in Columbus. The local station does not carry it nor does the *Columbia* station in Detroit. Broadcasters do not yet appear to believe that such programs are important enough to their listeners to warrant carrying them when to do so would involve either the shift of a local commercial program or the possibility of losing it altogether.

Another reason for the lack of large mass audiences is that these programs are not highly advertised and many listeners are not

aware that they are on the air. Probably the publicity given to the *Mercury Theater* as a result of the presentation of "The War of the Worlds" will increase the audience for that series very materially, in spite of the fact that it is scheduled at the same time as the most popular program on the air.

It is important, then, to tell your friends about significant programs which you have discovered. Steady, dependable audiences are built up by just such personal testimony. In addition, write letters of appreciation and criticism to the broadcasters, particularly when the programs are sustaining rather than commercial. The advertisers gauge public response by mail, by sales, and by impartial telephone and interview surveys. They can arrange contests and special offers to encourage listener reaction. The sustaining program, however, usually offers no such bait, and letters from listeners are given real consideration. Let the broadcasters know that their significant programs are being heard and appreciated.

There is another very real threat to the increase of programs of educational and cultural value. This threat is due to the sensitivity of broadcasters to criticism. Organized pressure groups can exert a telling influence unless they are counteracted by other pressures. The threat is to programs involving controversy and those dealing with material of social significance. When a program deals with housing in a realistic manner, there are apt to be criticisms from certain business groups interested in maintaining the *status quo*. Rather than offend such groups, the broadcaster is likely to delete such programs in the future. If criticism comes when a program deals with poverty, or war, or race relations, or labor, or any of the other significant and important controversial issues, then such a program is not likely to be broadcast again. The danger is that American radio drama may become perfect in form and sterile in content.

This is a real danger. Whatever may be

said about the public reaction and the mass hysteria caused by Orson Welles' presentation of "The War of the Worlds," it would be a tragedy if there resulted a ban upon the presentation of any social commentary in the series. If the Columbia Workshop should abandon all plays dealing with fascism, or war, or economic inequalities, and content itself with experimentation in sound effects and dramatic form relating to innocuous material, then the subsequent loss to American radio would be a major one.

If radio stations supported by universities were not to be permitted to present dramatic programs dealing with festering social problems, for fear of inciting criticism of the university from powerful pressure groups, the situation would be black indeed. If school broadcasts presented by educational groups were to be prevented from dealing with controversial issues because such broadcasts might bring reactions from influential minorities, then leadership in school broadcasting would assuredly be at a low ebb. But these things will happen unless discriminating listeners with real concern for the development of significant programs become vocal in their support of such programs. They must counter pressure with pressure, insisting that if education and culture mean anything at all, they are concerned with content as well as with form. They must make clear to educators, to broadcasters, to parents, and to high-school boys and girls, that the contemporary world is equally as important as the past and deserves just as skilled and effective a presentation.

Those who constantly harp on the merits of the "American system of broadcasting" should realize that the strongest element in this "system" has been its relative freedom in dealing with controversial material and with content of social significance. Unless radio drama is to become separated from life as a museum piece, it, too, must be vitally concerned with the contemporary

scene. And because drama is an effective educational technique we must boldly declare our conviction that it shall be used in the treatment of all the important concerns of human living, regardless of those who would emasculate it. Potentially, radio drama has immense significance; let the discriminating listener help it to realize its possibilities.

I. KEITH TYLER

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#### A UNIVERSITY DEAN ON THE MEETING OF MINDS

Important questions of educational policy, which are properly the scholars' care, can not be satisfactorily settled without a meeting of minds. It takes time for minds to meet—even quick minds, which all are not. There are dangers in any choice between the scholar's right to be let alone and the University's right to ask his aid in matters administrative. I have sought to steer a median course. I have avoided and abbreviated committee meetings whenever that seemed possible. I feel confident, however, that nothing has been done without the agreeable understanding of those concerned and that no one has been deprived of the opportunity to say his say and to have it considered with respect. Unlike legislative assemblies, a democracy of scholars does not draw the breath of its life from an invitation, not to say a compulsion, to palaver, however human it may be to indulge this weakness whenever and wherever men gather.

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Jobless teachers have been employed by W. P. A. and have taught more than a million adult Americans to read and write the English language, among other phases of the educational program.

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When anyone has offended me I try to raise my soul so high that the offense cannot reach it.—*Descartes*.