

RADIO HORROR: FOR CHILDREN ONLY

BY WORTHINGTON GIBSON

COME five o'clock every week-day afternoon, millions of American children drop whatever they are doing and rush to the nearest radio set. Here, with feverish eyes and cocked ears, they listen for that first carsplitting sound which indicates that the Children's Hour is at hand. This introductory signal may be the wail of a police siren, the rattle of a machine-gun, the explosion of a hand grenade, the shriek of a dying woman, the bark of a gangster's pistol, or the groan of a soul in purgatory. Whatever it is, the implication is the same: Radio has resumed its daily task of cultivating our children's morals—with blood-and-thunder effects.

The horrendous programs which clutter the ether from 5 to 6 P.M. cover a wide range of topics, but the theme of most is similar. Emphasis is placed on gore and violence: the other ingredients necessary to dramatic continuity are presented merely as camouflage. Some of the program heroes are Texas rangers, some are cowboys,

some are G-men, some are police officers, but one and all are occupied with the business of shooting their antagonists in cold blood, or laying plans to commit mayhem at the first opportunity. Somewhere a criminal's gun is being aimed, somewhere a smuggler's plane is crashing, somewhere a village bank is being robbed, somewhere a pirate boat is sinking, somewhere a bestial war is raging. Utilizing playscripts which are as ingenious as they are vicious, the heroes—and heroines—of the Children's Radio Hour hammer home the message of terror upon the sensitive minds of our younger generation. The results of such ceaseless bludgeoning are apparent to any casual observer of today's juvenile mind. With the aid of radio, we are doing our best to breed a race of neurotic impressionables.

The fact that children enjoy listening to blood-and-thunder thrillers is not remarkable; indeed, their parents spend considerable time listening to "adult" programs but a notch removed. The funda-

mental evil of the current trend is that children, being immature and inexperienced, have no opportunity to exercise choice in the matter. From their earliest days (having been born in the enlightened Radio Era) they have harked to horror on the air; it is impossible for them to realize that there might be an alternative. Hence they flock to the radio each afternoon in the manner of urchins chasing a fire engine. In fact, many of them consider listening to the radio a duty—a responsibility taking precedence over lessons. After all, school books are dry things. Why spend your time studying grammar when you can hear a prison siren wowl or a Dillinger's gun roar?

Behind the juvenile radio racket hangs an aura of commercialism, placed there by the program sponsors. At least once a day, each child is told to send three cents (six cents, ten cents) in stamps to the sponsor, in return for which he will receive a voodoo ring, an Oriental poison box, a police whistle, a sheriff's badge, or perhaps an up-to-date burglar's kit. For two box-tops of Puffsies, he wins a rubber dagger; three empty cartons of Boopsies bring a hand grenade (quite harmless, of course). And if the child is especially precocious, and drinks a cup of good rich vita-

min Glug with every meal, the sponsor will reward him with a fascinating dictograph device, with which he can perhaps listen in happily on his parents' squabbles, after dark. To date, few radio sponsors have offered gadgets possessing appreciable educational value. The bulk of the gewgaws savor of crime, violence, or skulduggery. Perhaps the distribution of these trinkets will make for a sturdier and more virile Young America; but the parents who observe such junk arrive in the morning's mail have a right to remain skeptical. It is difficult to understand how a pirate's mask or a *papier-mâché* Tommy gun can stir cultural longings.

Nevertheless, there is a school of parental thought which dismisses the juvenile radio problem with a smile. "Boys will be boys," they say. Or: "When we were young we read Nick Carter and Deadwood Dick, and it didn't blight our lives." But such arguments are as unsound as they are mendacious. The radio, by its power to play on the ear with horror effects, exercises a far stronger influence than did the dime-shockers of the 'Eighties. Moreover, in those days, such moralistic *littérateurs* as G. A. Henty, Horatio Alger, and Oliver Optic were on hand to

ameliorate the shock. Today's radio gives virtually no respite. Each day, come 5 o'clock, the same bloodcurdling broadcasts gurgle through the loudspeaker.

Nor is it helpful to point out that parent-teacher groups, educational associations, faculty organizations, consumer councils, and other civic units are conducting surveys of juvenile radio programs with an eye to "improving" the situation. A thousand indignant protests will avail nothing. Our radio-conscious children want blood and gore—they've been reared on it. And the sponsors are determined that as long as hack continuity writers and ham actors can grind out drama—and as long as children will send in three cents (six cents, ten cents) wrapped in a Plopsie wrapper—just so long will they work the horror-program racket.

A New York doctor recently reported on the case of a youthful patient who suffered from "night terrors". Each night the boy would awake, sweating and screaming, his face contorted, his muscles stiff. After essaying various treatments without success, the doctor cross-

examined the child. The boy appeared reluctant to discuss his case. Finally he confessed that some weeks earlier, he had listened to a children's radio program which involved a corpse, two ghosts, a haunted castle, and an ogre-like monster with one flaming eye. Each night as he lay in bed, the boy disclosed, his last waking thoughts dwelt upon the monster. The result was a nightmare of the most virulent type—mentally and physically harmful. . . . Was it for this that Marconi invented the wireless?

In the face of much more evidence of this type, and despite all the high-sounding words, erudite protests, and educational analyses, the Children's Hour sponsors stick grimly to their guns. They are out to win friends and influence kiddies.

Of course there *is* one guaranteed cure for the whole business: one conclusive and irrevocable way to end this curse upon your children's minds. That is to toss your radio set out the window. But who ever heard of a freeborn American doing such a thing as that?



WHY WE HAVE FARMERS

By FRANK MONEY

EVER since the first farmer struck his hoe into the soil, he has found the going tough. This is so well understood that, outside the farm fraternity, farming as an occupation ranks at zero. The piles of manure to be forked loom too large, white shirts soil easily, and sweat runs all day. But there are also other deterrents. In an age that worships an adequate effortless income, leisure, diversion, and the latest gadgets of animal comfort, no one rushes to become part of a community where seven homes out of eight are without electricity, twelve out of thirteen without bathrooms, six out of seven without piped water; where steam heat is a rarity and telephones are available to one family in three; where there are no subways or taxis, and the nearest take-off is a bus stop five miles distant; where the only entertainment is canned or self-supplied, and night life is a thing one reads about. Nevertheless, a new farmer is born every minute and the old ones give no evidence of relinquishing the plow. Naturally,

one asks why these people stick to a job that no one else wants.

But the farmer took his job with open eyes, fully aware of the possibilities elsewhere. There was a time when he knew little of what transpired beyond his own bailiwick, but those days are gone, along with the ingenuous farm lass. Radio, the movies, and the automobile have narrowed the gap between city and country. The farmer sees the same movies as the city slickers, listens to the same radio programs, and invades by automobile the urbanites' own stamping ground. Yet he continues to live on the farm, and his decision can be attributed only to preference. There are thousands of the younger generation of farmers who know what it is all about. They come from prosperous farm families and have had the advantage of a college education and the opportunity to enter any pursuit of their choice. There are also thousands of others who left the farm at an early age, made money for a few years, and then returned as soon as they had saved enough to