



TV AND RADIO

Under the Eye of Eternity?

THE reports on the opening of international European television programs were not too promising; the chief impression one retains is of an impressive ceremony at the Vatican and, for the rest, travelogues. Not the sort of thing to make an American broadcaster envious. And the name, Eurovision, has a commercial tang, so perhaps we aren't so bad after all.

We aren't so bad, but there is something a little disturbing, nonetheless, in the thought of television programs which are created in any one of seven or eight countries and cross as many frontiers and are seen by people of many faiths and habits and languages and characters. The difficulties are so easy to see, the inevitable waste when you put on a program in Italian and beam it into Germany, and so forth. The opportunities are tremendous, too. And most of all, it seems to me, the idea itself of a television which crosses frontiers might be used as an impossible standard for judging our own programs.

I say "an impossible standard" because if a producer or sponsor should ever begin to think no program worth creating unless it were fit for international consumption we should have a sort of paralysis—the ideal would simply destroy the possible useful and good programs we now have. Negatively the criterion of international value is as useless to us as the idea of living always under the eye of eternity is impracticable for most people. But positively there's something in it: let us set out to create some programs good enough to be used internationally. (The British Broadcasting Corporation acquired the right to the formula of "What's My Line?"—but this isn't exactly the same thing as an international program.)

We have had such programs—usually single shots in the dramatic field or certain documentaries—and I sug-

gest only that when 90 per cent of our entertainment is hardly worth crossing a state line for the possibilities of improvement are immense. Moreover, setting a high standard will get the producers of television off a hook which in the end may lacerate them badly: it is the hook of harmlessness.

The critics of television do not call it harmless. I am (not actively enough) on the board of some organized critics: The National Association for Better Radio and Television (NAFBRAT, for short), and this organization is convinced that "the volume of crime and the degree of violence which dominate TV programs for children" should dismay all American parents. A special committee of evaluation finds some excellent children's programs, too; twenty-one of them in fact. And it also finds that "more money is spent on the production of a single half-hour crime Western than for the production of the entire twenty-one programs classified as excellent."

So the critics try to impale the producers on the spear of harmfulness—just as Dr. Frederic Wertham does with the producers of comic-horror-books. The producers in each case reply that what they create is not harmful. Once in a great while they say "Children should be brought up to face the realities of life—so they must know that crime and other sordid things exist." But the one thing they do not say is "These crime Westerns, these crime comics, these films of brutality, are the best thing a child can possibly have; they must have these rather than anything else, because these things give the child inspiration, these enrich his life."

And the whole point is that everyone leaves it to everyone else to provide the enrichment of life—because that is hard to do without becoming "do-goodish" and harder still to do without losing your audience. No one does anything positive, no one says, "We have an obligation and we are fulfilling it." (The exceptions to "no one" are few.) The consequence is that the whole broadcasting industry thinks it is all right, and the world is all right, if no positive proof of harm can be shown, as if merely not committing a crime is the justification of the whole business.

It is in the end an uncreative attitude of mind and in the end it will

lead to stultification. The elation that comes into a network's press-releases when something positive occurs, when a service has been rendered, is a kind of proof that for most of the time the work accomplished has been nothing better than harmless—a kind of social sterility.

JOHNCROSBY, observing the figures and the reasoning of the NAFBRAT committee, has suggested—almost demanded—that the networks step in and handle children's programs as they handle news—namely as their own creations, out of the control of the sponsor. It goes against the grain of our society for the Government to say that we can or can't have certain types of entertainment and there is just enough difference between news and children's programs we make to wonder whether the FCC wouldn't uphold a sponsor who insisted on his right to produce a show for which he had bought the time. But the proposal has merit in this: the network-produced body of shows would be so constantly under critical observation that pressure could be brought to bear—critical pressure from parents to which the networks would be responsive. And presently parents would begin to want not merely programs that had not been proved harmful, but programs positively good for their children—good and popular, too. They have existed—they can exist in more profusion.

—GILBERT SELDES.

**FRASER YOUNG'S
LITERARY CRYPT NO. 582**

A cryptogram is writing in cipher. Every letter is part of a code that remains constant throughout the puzzle. Answer No. 582 will be found in the next issue.

IEYGY DH JATJPH QCY

BJC IQ HIJIY IEY MJHY

ZQG ZGYYKQB. IEJTH JAA

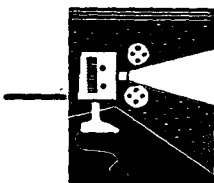
TY CYYK, QCY.

—MAJGYCMY KLGGQT.

Answer to No. 581

If people did no more than they had to, life would come to a standstill tomorrow.—Author Unknown.





People and Places

EVER since I bought a 16mm sound projector I've been a happy stay-at-home, content to see the world from an easy chair. However, for a few weeks this summer I abandoned projector and screen (or so I thought) and bestirred myself to visit two extremely attractive cities—Minneapolis, Minnesota, and Rochester, New York—with brief interludes at Duluth, Mackinac Island, Detroit, Buffalo, and Toronto. This energetic undertaking was prompted by the American Library Association's annual convention, the University of Minnesota's first Film Week, and celebrations of the George Eastman Centennial.

In three weeks away from home I saw more 16mm films and met more film-talking people than I am apt to do in a month of New York City Sundays. Fortunately, I bought a little brown notebook and kept a day-by-day record of every noteworthy thing that came my way. Unfortunately, this is the same little brown notebook which I last saw in a telephone booth in Rochester, two days before I returned home. Here is my best recollection of what it contained, with apologies for any misspellings or misrememberings that may have crept into this midsummer mishmash.

First off, I arrived in Minneapolis in time to be present when the American Library Association held its first meeting, adopted a constitution, and elected its officers. This is the first major film activity ALA has undertaken in the several years since termination of a Carnegie grant which laid the groundwork for the excellent film services offered in many public libraries. In the intervening years, even without a film executive and a formal pattern of participation, there has been a consistent rapport among these first-generation film librarians. Now new faces are coming into the picture, and through the Audio-Visual Round Table they have a chance to learn and to develop new ideas together. Chairman of the A-V Round Table is Mrs. Muriel C. Javelin (Boston Public Library) and vice chairman is Miss Virginia Beard (Cleveland Public Library). Much credit for ALA's recurrent interest in 16mm film work goes to its associate executive secretary, Mrs. Grace T. Stevenson, who knows a good film when she sees one.

Daily film shows in the Minneapolis Public Library were an interesting

sidelight of the ALA convention. Under the direction of Margaret Fletcher and Mrs. Agatha Klein (representing Minneapolis and St. Paul libraries respectively), several dozen new productions were screened at noon-hour sessions. With Karlne Brown, this year's ALA Audio-Visual Board chairman, I stopped in and saw a couple of films, as well as the film-lending facilities of the Minneapolis Public Library. Karlne, who has directed the Cincinnati Public Library's Films and Recordings Section since its founding seven years ago, tells me that this fall the library moves into a brand-new handsome building, which handsomely equipped audio-visual quarters. I've put it first on my list of places to visit next time.

I arrived in Minneapolis too late to attend the meeting at which the feature film "The Wild Ones" (starring Marlon Brando) was shown. Discussion on the film, by Lester Asheim, dean of Chicago's Graduate Library School, was, I am told, lively and perceptive. This was the first time, to my recollection, that a Hollywood film has been selected for use in a demonstration film forum.

Wandering through the display booths, picking up free literature and gossip, I learned that this fall Simon & Schuster will publish a book based on Disney's hit film "The Living Desert." People were talking, too, about this year's Newbery-Caldecott winners—Joseph Krumgold's "And Now Miguel," based on a documentary movie which the author had directed, and Ludwig Bemelman's "Madeline," which UPA so delightfully rendered into a theatrical cartoon. (None of these three films is currently available for 16mm use. "The Living Desert"—perhaps in a few years. "And Now Miguel"—made for Government overseas distribution, its domestic release may be in the near, or distant, future. "Madeline"—the contracted property of Columbia Pictures, and not likely ever to be available for non-commercial use, alas.)

I am not one who regards group discussion as an out-and-out triumph, but let me say how happy I am to have wandered into the booth of the ALA American Heritage Project and met its two discussion trainers, R. E. Dooley and Leonard Freedman. After my hour's discussion with these two gentlemen, a discussion about discussion and its values and limitations,

I am ready to go under oath to the effect that (1) discussion (as they define and practise it) has endlessly exciting and essential parts to play in democratic development, and (2) the Fund for Adult Education could not conceivably put its money and faith into a worthier endeavor. The project goes into its fourth year now, using books and films to stimulate nearly seven thousand participants in expressing and thus clarifying their ideas about the American past, present, and future. To help train discussion leaders for more than 350 active groups Mr. Dooley and Mr. Freedman will be traveling around the country to various cities involved in the project. They can't go everywhere, however, and what is needed is a first-rate film to show these two in action.

Across the river from the ALA meeting, and concurrently with it, the University of Minnesota's first Film Week attracted a serious group of film students from neighboring states, for a crowded schedule of lectures, discussions, and screenings. I must have looked at ten hours of film, and the students probably did at least three times that well. Films which had been produced by student and staff participants were also shown and discussed—including a University of Wisconsin color production on cancer research, directed and written by Jackson Tiffany; several films with electronic sound by Louis and Bebe Barron, and a number of films and excerpts by Paul Falkenberg.

AS the final event of the Film Week, Rouben Mamoulian was guest speaker before an open meeting in the University auditorium. Mamoulian is best known for his movies "The Gay Desperado," "Love Me Tonight," and "Becky Sharp" (the first all-Technicolor feature film), and for his stage direction of "Porgy," "Porgy and Bess," "Oklahoma!" and "Carousel." Introducing a screening of his color film "Blood and Sand," Mamoulian stressed the planning that had gone into its color composition—and when the lights went out it was heartbreakingly discovered that a black-and-white print of the film had been sent by error. Mamoulian interceded and suggested that without color the film was not worth sitting through. The projectionist turned it on again, however, and such is the power of the moving picture that, although it had been warned it was being served a "dirty turkey," the audience stayed and enjoyed what it could.

Interest in the first University of Minnesota Film Week was high enough to warrant the planning of another for next year. Again it is to be offered under the direction of Dr