

Don't Look Now . . .



We hope...

From Jo-Jo the Dog Faced Boy to the chancellors of Europe, here they come to invade the privacy of the home. Be we ever so humble, the lease has expired. Television, we are here!

OF ALL the brats, legitimate and otherwise, sired of the entertainment business, the youngest, television, looks as if it would be the hardest to raise and to housebreak. Reasons—if you want them—are that every time a new technical development appears, it demands not only a new technique but also better entertainment.

Television, after the first flurry of curiosity, will have to be of the best.

These days a hush-hush atmosphere hangs over the big broadcasting offices. Each of the larger chains has its spacious and impressive headquarters for the new branch; but the impression one gathers is that all important plans are filed under the rug. You go in boldly enough and ask your questions; but you slink out. Your feeling is that any Jap could paddle the length of the Panama Canal in a canoe with less of the sensation that the very walls have ears—and eyes. Your thoughts about television are apt to be a little muddy at first. After a complete explanation they are apt to turn viscous and opaque. So the complete explanation is by unanimous vote left out. There remains only the question: What are we going to get in the way of entertainment? For we are a spoiled and finicky people, by and large, and we won't stand for a lump of coal in the toe of this newest Christmas stocking.

The nearest parallel to the launching of television is, of course, the history

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of sound pictures. When they first came out, with all their shortcomings and ghastly faults, curiosity made them successes. In turn, the curiosity-money financed further experiment toward perfection, or at least adequacy. People swarmed to see the early ones. After the novelty wore off, though, talking pictures sagged. A long hiatus intervened. Then, basic technical problems solved, talkies had to sweat and dig for entertainment values good enough for eye-plus-ear showmanship.

It's a practical cinch that all the receiving and most of the broadcasting apparatus for television will quickly become outdated. Yet it will still be adequate. Certain agreements exist which insure that television broadcasts will be maintained at the same standard of reception regardless of new improvements. A change of the light frequency would at once invalidate every set so far sold. The screen would be dark; and as broadcasting companies, after all, are dependent upon their audiences and their sponsors, a blank screen would mean no shredded-wheat sales. Whatever set you buy will be good for about three years, and by then you won't be able to resist the newer gadgets as they come out.

Reception as you see it on your nine-by-twelve-inch screen will be about the equivalent of your 16 mm. home movies, except that you will not have the pride of creation which compensates for so many of your shortcomings as a cameraman. One ghost, however, ought here to be driven into its attic and finally exorcised: The photographs of television shots which you have seen in magazines are as unfair to the projected image on the screen as are the enlargements you make from your movies. They are grainy, shot through with lines, and rather blurred. You find much the same thing when enlarging from a motion picture film. If you want an analogy, you ask yourself why movie studios take so many still photographs instead of enlarging direct from motion picture film.

Good entertainment costs money. Yet it is the most profitable business in the world. Don't bother to look at Shirley Temple's income figures. Turn right back to Solomon, Cleopatra, Caesar, Napoleon, and Mussolini, not to mention Sam Goldwyn. They had the thing we buy. And now we're to be suckers for television. We will pay and love it—if it's good enough.

There are lots of difficulties. Re-

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member silent-film technique when sound was first applied? Somewhere from the depths of my mind comes this sequence: A lively beauty points cause programs, especially dramatic pieces, will be desperately expensive. Will all radio performers have to be good-looking? Will we have to lay the radio on its side on the floor to have Kate Smith fit into the screen?

The answer to all these is Yes.

But the main problem, at least to observers in the entertainment business, remains fundamental; and so far nobody admits having solved it. When you go to the theatre or a movie, you go with two items in favor of your enjoying the program: You concentrate completely on what you came to see, for one; and for the other, you are involved by the price of admission to enjoy it at least that much. With television coming gratis out of the ether, won't you be more captious? Will you have time, in the distractions and obligations of your home, with the doorbell at a dress, glares, stamps her foot. Cut to the printed caption "NO!" Or at least that is what should have happened. But instead of a caption there boomed from the rafters a reverberating NO, delivered from a face six feet long on the screen, which made men shudder and salesgirls faint.

The only similar overdramatization I can recall is the occasion when a newspaperman asked President Coolidge if he was going to urge repayment of all European war debts, and the President said, "Huh-uh!"

All this points a rather interesting question: Are we going to have figures the size of mice, on a nine-by-twelve-inch screen, emitting blasts of sound which rattle the ice in our glasses? Is there ever to be a balance of dramatic effect between sound and sight?

You can ask other questions: Can the programs be transmitted or relayed over long distances? They must be, because programs, especially dramatic pieces, will be desperately expensive. Will all radio performers have to be good-looking? Will we have to lay the radio on its side on the floor to have Kate Smith fit into the screen? and the highballs and the children all demanding attention, to focus your eyes and ears on a nine-by-twelve-inch screen for an hour-long drama?

Will there be bitter battles about the fireside when Father wants to cut a slushy drama and get to the news?

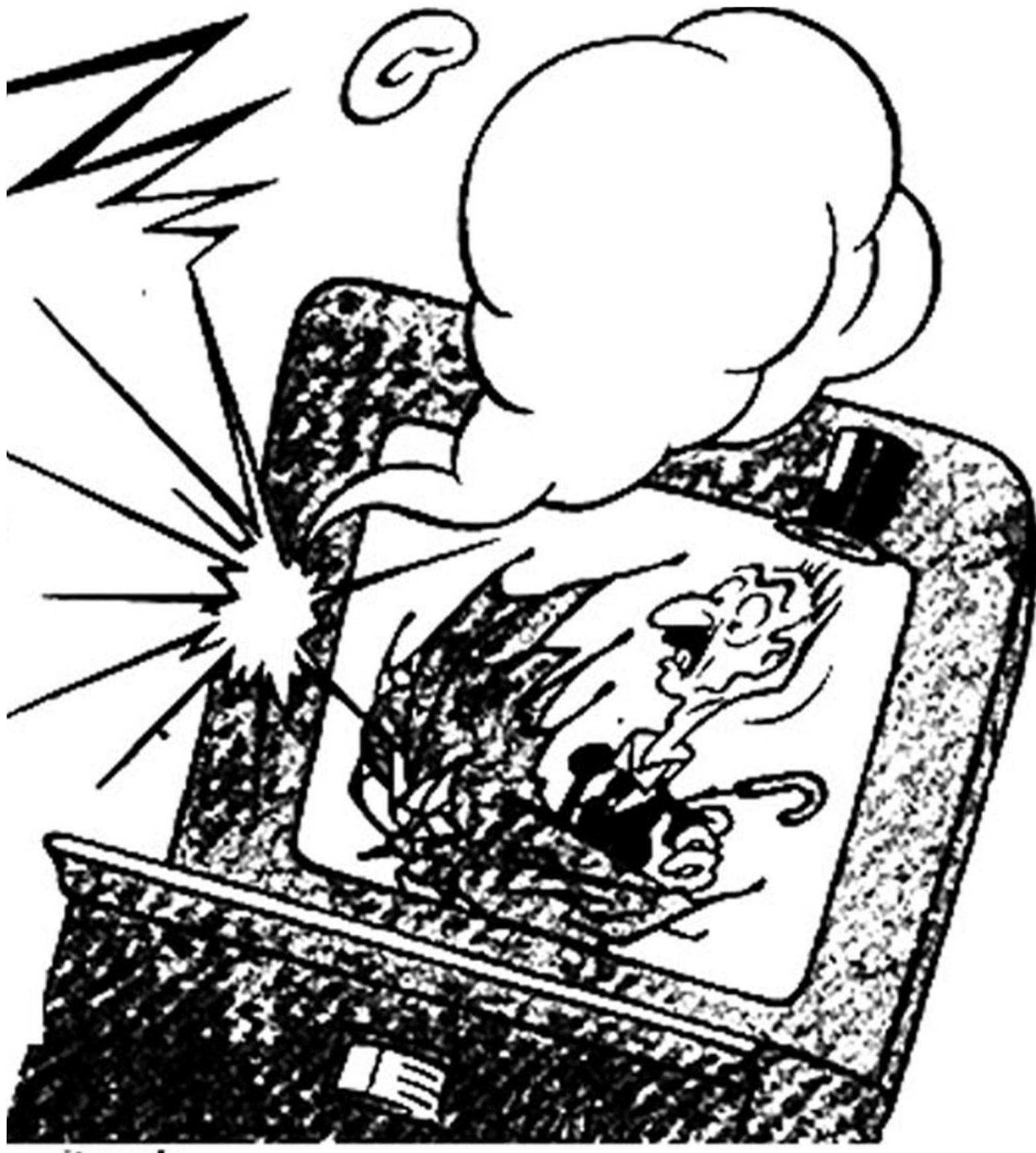
Yep.

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What is the solution? One thing only, better entertainment. Television is going to have to hold its audiences. Once curiosity is satisfied, the lads at the studios will be hard put to it to glue your eyes to that screen.

Is it worth it? Worth the investment?

Well, we're Americans, naturally we'll plunge \$350 for a set. Eventually



the studios will give us what we want. Invention is the greatest pride of our race; here's a new gadget; and by gosh we'll enjoy television even if we have to invent our enjoyment.