

## BRUCE BLIVEN ON RADIO, 1927 ~

It is extremely doubtful that anyone of the current generation, claiming specious relationship with American Letters, would sit up and take notice at mention of Bruce Bliven. Yet his editorship of *The New Republic*, which came into being in the Twenties, affected every other socio-political medium of the decade, and his influence can be spotted in many present-day political publications. As was Edmund "Bunny" Wilson, he was a force to be reckoned with, if you were seriously concerned with American Letters. I met him some time after his political views had become a bit radical, and when he asked me to contribute to his magazine, I declined, as I was and am non-political anent all things. However, the degree of Bliven's perceptivity may be gotten from the following comments written by him in 1927.

*"In advocating that we should put an end to the ceaseless flow of oral garbage into our homes which the radio at present provides, I am not suggesting that we should slavishly imitate the experience of any other country. I happen to believe, after a good deal of first-hand experience, that radio broadcasting in England is much better than in the U.S. If we set to work to really reform radio broadcasting, being Americans, we should be able to produce something better than exists anywhere else in the world.*

*"I remember the days, 15 years ago, when radio broadcasting was just making its appearance. At that time, we were all tremendously excited about its marvellous possibilities. So far as America is concerned those possibilities have not been fulfilled. What radio does in the realm of serious music is a disgrace. What it does in the field of education is pitiful. What it does in the field of news is nothing. The newspaper publishers have effectively stopt intelligent reportage.*

*"There are those who will immediately parade forth this-or-that "good" program, most of them lasting the conventional 15 minutes. That is like saying of a beautiful woman that she appeared in a white dress, only part of which was dirty... Radio as presently constituted has driven all listeners away, save morons - if you don't believe this, ask your friends. Turning on the radio today is the equivalent of letting off a stench-bomb in the family living-room!"*

As I have stated, and iterated, the advent of Radio must be viewed in the light of sociological phenomena, and Bliven's jaundiced eye simply tended to emphasise this, I feel. The not-so-gentled irony, of course, is that his comments of 1927 are more apt now, than in 1927, and decidedly applicable to the idiot-tube of TV.