Choice Morsels from the Times

THE *New York Times* is one of a rare journalistic breed—a Jack-of-all-trades and master of most. While many of the nation's newspapers have to fatten themselves on a diet of syndicated fun and games, the *Times*, day in and day out, relies largely on the news-gathering talents of its own staff—and sweet talents there are. The quality of its achievement, which is roughly comparable to batting .400 for the Pirates, winning the Davis Cup from Australia, and on spare afternoons playing quarterback for the Eagles, is nowhere more apparent than in its Sunday edition, a wondrous cargo of newsprint so vast only a grown man can carry it home.

The person responsible for much of that edition is Lester Markel, the *Times*'s Sunday editor since 1923, who each week shepherds to the press the drama and book review sections, the "News of the Week in Review," and the *New York Times Magazine*. From the latter, a compendium that has consistently tapped the best of *Times* staffers and others, Mr. Markel has culled an anthology of seventy-odd articles, published under the title **"Background and Foreground"** (Channel Press, $5). Covering some thirty years, it offers a swiftly paced panoramic view of the news, ideas, amusements, and personalities that have engaged the attention of Americans during that time [*see box*]. Here, for example, are Rebecca West writing on the atom spy Klaus Fuchs (1951); Meyer Berger on the war-wounded at Valley Forge General Hospital (1946); James MacGregor Burns on the qualifications needed in a President (1960); Albert Einstein on religion and science (1930); William O. Douglas on McCarthyism (1952); Adlai Stevenson on the Soviet challenge to the West (1959); Cornelia Otis Skinner on stage fright (1958); Ashley Montagu on the question "Should Strong Men Cry?" (1957); and Hanson Baldwin on D-Day (1959), a poignant and memorable recollection fifteen years after the event. While an occasional piece strikes me as somewhat ephemeral for inclusion in an anthology, one can be grateful for the absence of articles on the Abominable Snowman and the Loch Ness Monster, subjects apparently dear to the *Magazine*'s heart.

As pertinent as any part of the book for the working journalist is Mr. Markel's introduction, a mixed hymn of joy and lamentation. While he writes, "The editor believes that, in the course of his directorship, many highly esteemed contributors have supplied . . . much gleaming currency," he also says:

> The search for good writing is becoming a more and more jungled safari. On the one hand there are the Purple Prose Boys who overwhelm you with lush adverbs and lusher adjectives. . . . On the other there are the Simple Simon Fellows, who insist that you should write as you talk (most of them shouldn't even talk as they talk). . . . Save us, please, from both. Good writing, I hold, is not a matter of mathematics or mechanics; you cannot legislate or decree or prescribe any rules for it. It is a rare, a most uncommon process, marked by individuality, by sensitivity, by perception. It arises, as T. S. Eliot said, out of the "agonizing ecstasy" of creation. Good writing, in brief, cannot be instilled into an aspirant; it can only be distilled out of those who have the initial talent.

To which every editor will no doubt utter a weary and heartfelt amen.

—JAMES F. FIXX.

WHY WE BUY: "The Spenders," by Steuart Henderson Britt (McGraw-Hill, $4.95), is dedicated to the proposition that in the American economy the consumer is king. In an attempt to rebut arguments like those found in Vance Packard's "The Waste Makers," the author, a professor of marketing

The New York Times Magazine: A Sampler

". . . The biologist denies emphatically that there are human war instincts, either for the waging of war in a particular way, or to make war in general. But there does exist a human drive or impulse of pugnacity, which can be used as the foundation of a war sentiment; and this will continue to express itself in war as long as external conditions encourage or permit this expression of human nature. It is up to us to alter the conditions so as to prevent human pugnacity from expressing itself in war. . . ." —*Julian Huxley (1946).*

"Our world has grandeur and life has hope. In spite of the despair of the beats and the wailers, the harp in the air still sings the melody of hope, and hope in action will sing on everlastingly till, maybe, a thousand million years from now time gives its last sigh, and all things go." —*Sean O'Casey (1959).*

"If a strange dog accosts you on the street and asks you what time it is, there is no reason to quit drinking or consult a psychiatrist. Just tell him what time it is and go on about your business." —*James Thurber (1948).*

"My expectation is that the challenges presented to Western civilization in our time are going to arouse us to repent, to reform, and to lead a new life." —*Arnold J. Toynbee (1955).*

". . . Our Russian competitors are much tougher than most of us have yet realized—and . . . this time we might get licked, unless we are willing to change our habits, our political behavior, and our complacent outlook on the world." —*Adlai Stevenson (1959).*

"[A] watchword which the New America exports to poor Europe is the great word 'Success.' . . . Success is the aim and thought of life! It is really astounding how this watchword begins to demoralize Europe." —*Karel Capek (1926).*

". . . Public personalities must accustom themselves to a kind of indecent exposure. Contemporaries knew nothing about George Washington's false teeth or Catherine the Great's wig. Today's famous statesmen inhabit an aquarium." —*C. L. Sulzberger (1960).*

". . . The cosmic religious experience is the strongest and the noblest driving force behind scientific research." —*Albert Einstein (1930).*

and advertising at Northwestern University, has put together a case for the defense. But about the most he can hope for is a hung jury.

Few readers will be inclined to quarrel with Mr. Britt's assertions that the American consumer has a wider range to choose from than ever before, that there is more money to be spent, and that these trends will probably accelerate sharply in the next few years. All this is carefully documented. But he seems to me on less secure ground when he tries to build his case for the consumer's power in determining the products that will be made available to him, for the beneficent educational function of advertising, and for the values of motivation and market research. In discussing research in packaging design, for example, Mr. Britt writes: "These kinds of research do not represent a conspiracy against us consumers. They are not attempts to invade our privacy or pry open our minds. . . . They are sincere attempts by manufacturers to produce better goods . . . to please both *us* and *them*." One may perhaps be forgiven for wondering exactly what bearing the design printed on a package has on better goods.

Though parts of "The Spenders"—notably those in which the author reports on who buys what and why—are fresh and eye-opening, the book as a whole is no match for the hardy band of advertising's critics. —J.F.F.

FACT AND FANCY: The mass media, it would appear, have less influence on opinion and action than has generally been supposed. This is the major conclusion of **"The Effects of Mass Communication,"** by Joseph T. Klapper (Free Press, $5), a thorough study that bears careful reading by the professional communicator who wonders about the strength of his trade's influence, as well as by anyone else who wonders what radio, television, comic books, and movies are doing to himself and his children. Based on meticulous research, the book first explores the persuasive powers of the mass media in general, then narrows its scope to examine the effects of adult TV programs on children, and the impact of crime, violence, and escapist material.

Despite an occasional tremor of alarm, the findings are reassuring. "Mass communication," writes the author, "*ordinarily* does not serve as a necessary and sufficient cause of audience effects, but rather functions among and through a nexus of mediating factors and influences." It may be quite a mouthful, but the point here, as elsewhere in the book, is worth digging for. —J.F.F.

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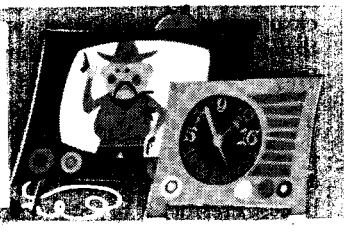

Advertising's Age of Quality

By Robert Lewis Shayon

SHAKESPEARE, end to end, has always been one of the great untested hypotheses of broadcasting. "Put all of the Bard's plays on television weekly," runs the ancient saw, "and what have you got—thirty-six weeks" (actually thirty-eight, if you include "John" and "Two Noble Kinsmen"). Broadcasters make the point to underscore the difficulty of presenting a regular flow of quality drama on television, which swiftly devours all the material it can get its hands on. The possibility of continuous Shakespeare on sponsored television seemed destined to be forever pure fancy, but miracles proceed apace in our time. The far side of the moon has been seen, and now, amazingly, Shakespeare is being displayed on television in a qualitatively superb cycle. A fifteen-week series of Shakespeare's histories, "An Age of Kings," is being shown in Washington and New York under the sponsorship of the Standard Oil Company (New Jersey). The outlets are the Metropolitan Broadcasting Corporation's WNEW-TV and WTTG-TV. The Richards (I and II) and the Henrys (IV, V, VI) are being presented in their entirety in hour-or-more segments grandly produced by the British Broadcasting Corporation.

What an exciting concept this is! To take the chronicle plays with their interlocking plots and royal dynasties and to present them in sequence; to cast the same actors as the same characters in successive plays; and to produce the whole spectacle in pure television idiom, without film, and in a style perfected by almost five centuries of English Shakespearian acting tradition—this is an offering of the television art that could have come into being only at the BBC. No other television organization of public or private enterprise anywhere in the world could have aspired to such an undertaking, or, having the aspiration, would also have enjoyed the economic and cultural milieu in which to bring it off successfully. I watched the first two programs, "The Hollow Crown," and "The Deposing of a King" (all of Richard II) on Channel 5 in New York. Shakespeare's histories, read and seen intermittently, have never quite come into single focus for me. I have never been able to capture the Henrys, Edwards, Yorks, Gloucesters, and Lancasters in any organic pattern of event and significance. The moment I scanned the press releases announcing "An Age of Kings" I knew I would not miss a single episode if I could help it. Standard Oil, fortunately, gave me two chances: in Washington and New York each episode is being presented on two separate days.

From the opening confrontation between Bolingbroke and Norfolk before the vain, posturing Richard II, I appreciated the unprecedented privilege available to viewers in the two city areas. They could look forward to experiencing the cumulative impact of Shakespeare's imagination as it ranged over the English court (the poet's symbol of the world) at the time of the War of the Roses. They could see the pageant staged simply for the television cameras with a respectable minimum of stage movement and the accent on the unspent torrent of Shakespeare's verbal images spoken with intimate, immaculate diction by the British players. They could savor in a concentrated mass, as no other American audience had ever done, the theatrical wizardry this man drew from the wars, conspiracies, and murders that marked the reigns of seven ambitious English monarchs. The opportunity was extraordinary. I asked Diana, my eleven-year old daughter, to watch with me. I was seeking for her, in Pat Weaver's former, estimable NBC-TV phrase, "enlightenment through exposure."

The opposition on the networks in the three-program time period was formidable: a staple diet of Westerns, family comedies, and thrillers. The lure of "Dobie Gillis" and Hitchcock for Diana was great. The language of Shakespeare came to her across 400 years. It was strange, metered, difficult for unaccustomed ears to follow and understand. I could not tell whether any