

COMMUNICATIONS

Communications Editor: RICHARD L. TOBIN



EDITORIAL

By Richard L. Tobin 47

LETTERS TO THE

COMMUNICATIONS EDITOR 48

NEWS AND LATIN AMERICA:

A BALANCE SHEET

By Barnard L. Collier 50

WHAT'S HAPPENING TO JOURNALISM EDUCATION?

By John Tebbel 52

ESTHETICS AND THE NEWS

By Robert Lewis Shayon 53

HOW TO CRITICIZE ADVERTISING

By Harry C. Groome, Jr. 54

THE ISLAND OF YESTERDAY AFTERNOON:

MEMORIES OF A PRESS TELEGRAPHER

By Maurice Siegel 55

FULL DISCLOSURE

By L. L. L. Golden 56

STUDIES IN SUCCESS

By James F. Fixx 58

THE RIPPLE EFFECT

By Arthur Knight 60



The Confederacy of Dunces

THE PARAPHRASE comes from Jonathan Swift, as good a scribbler as ever dipped his pen in acid: "When a true genius appears in the world, you may know him by this sign, that the dunces are all in confederacy against him." Addressing a life insurance advertising association in Toronto a few weeks ago, George Gribbin, chairman of Young & Rubicam, used "The Confederacy of Dunces" as his title and Swift as his text. His premise was sound: that nothing much has happened to dissolve the confederation, and that all you have to do to prove that the dunces are still with us is to suggest a single fresh idea in print or over the air. Any good communicator can tell you what happens next. The confederacy closes ranks against the innovator, uniting by stupidity and fear against genius and innovation wherever they appear. In this context, genius and innovation combine to mean the same thing—something foresighted, something clearly seen ahead of its time, something usually unpopular because it will upset the status quo for those in command and the security of the majority. In short, an idea that is new must forever buck the barrier of a front united by fear of change.

Mr. Gribbin pointed to notable victims of the conspiracy. Socrates surely was one of the earliest in the field of free thought. Another historic target, Galileo, built a telescope that helped him prove the new theories of the universe, theories running counter to clerical ukase. They all but cost him his life. The confederacy reacted violently when Edward Jenner announced the first vaccine after noticing that victims of cowpox, a relatively minor disease, rarely contracted smallpox, an often fatal one. Darwin's theories of evolution shook the confederacy as late as the first quarter of the twentieth century when John Scopes was tried in Tennessee. "The chief dunce of the Scopes trial," Mr. Gribbin pointed out, "was William Jennings Bryan, a former Secretary of State, and three times a candidate for the Presidency of the United States."

What happens when new ideas are published is quite simple, and most good editors know the format well. Man doesn't like to see his social institutions and thought patterns threatened. When men of prescience lead their fellows into the unknown, as geniuses do, things must change; suddenly, and latently, the old society appears illogical, even to itself. Mrs. Patrick Campbell probably said it best when trying to pinpoint the hypocrisy of Edwardian social behavior: "You can do anything you like here as long as you don't do it in the street and frighten the horses."

This boils down to something every professional communicator must forever keep in mind: that it is difficult, in the words of an early genius of rocketry, Dr. Robert H. Goddard, "to say what is impossible." The truth is that nothing, absolutely nothing the mind of man can conceive, can be truly said to be "impossible."

Interplanetary travel, literally impossible to the generation before us, is now likely; indeed, a date has been fixed for the first venture—to the moon in the late 1960s. Infectious disease in plague form once was thought to be an act of God and as such should not be tampered with

but accepted as a religious experience. Most endemic diseases are by now either under control or all but wiped out through one form of antibiotic or another. Democracy, that most sophisticated of political systems, appears at last to have looked at itself in the American mirror and decided that it must alter its image to something nearer what the words say. Impossible? Ask any conscientious Southern editor and he will tell you there are changes in his district he could not have believed a few months back.

A cure for one of the cancers? It will surely come, and when it comes it will be a tremendous news story, but one the editors and broadcasters will have to handle with care. Printing without a press is already here, in several forms, the most common of which is facsimile, sending news pages electronically into the home via a sort of telephoto scanner. Boats that skim a mile a minute over the surface of the water rather than in it will soon be common through the hydrofoil and air-cushioned hovercraft. General Sarnoff wrote in these pages some time ago that it won't be very long before we're communicating with each other miles apart as we walk along the street. We'll each have our own pocket "telephone" and it won't need any wires.

Whatever advances come, in the social structure or in science, Mr. Gribbin's "Confederacy of Dunces" will surely oppose them, as in the past. The first line of defense against this confederacy will, as in the past, be the professionals in news, the communicators whose primary job it is to spot trends and genius, support what is worthy of dissemination and success, and help break down that dangerous human inhibition, the fear of change.

—R.L.T.



Letters to the Communications Editor



TV COMMERCIALS AS AN ART FORM

I WAS SURPRISED that no mention was made by John Tebbel in his article "How Europe Fights Commercial TV" [SR, Aug. 10] of the attempts of Britt Wadner to introduce commercial TV in Sweden.

Television commercials are an art form, one that could stand much improvement to be sure, but still an art form. Since so many of your readers see federal grants as the cornucopia for artists, why not set up a federal advisory board like the National Science Foundation to help poor starving television commercial writers improve?

Seriously, the one thing I dislike about our local ETV station is that without commercials there is no time between programs or during them to get a snack or do other similar short chores. Commercials pay for the programs and provide a break—they are a boon, not a bane.

LARRY MEISSNER.

Deer Island, Ore.

JOHN TEBBEL's statement that Americans watching European TV become uncomfortable, impatient, and irritated when deprived of the dubious privilege of watching commercials is pure nonsense.

Most of my viewing is limited to ultra high frequency and when I watch the ordinary TV programs I turn off all commercials.

I would be only too happy to pay for the privilege of having at hand civilized, adult programs such as *The Age of Kings* to which I could turn. For the present, commercial TV is not even a substitute for a bad book.

DAN H. MCCULLOUGH.

Toledo, O.

"PATENTLY PHONY INTERVIEWS"

I HOPE it isn't too late to add my agreement to Diane Hewitson's feelings about disgusting television advertising. I refuse to buy any product using patently phony interviews. And who would buy a soap that urges you for the first time in your life to be really clean, and tells you how to avoid detergent hands? The simplest answer: don't use detergents. Ivory soap was prescribed by two doctors for my blond baby's bath more than forty years ago. Why change? But sadly Ivory felt the pressure and came out with a detergent when they had a product that should have whipped all the detergents by sticking to their old advertisement of a baby saying, "I'm all complexion," as he splashes in his Ivory soap bath. Tell Norma Schmitten to switch.

GERTRUDE STEPHENS.

Dallas, Tex.

MENCKEN AND READER'S DIGEST

MR. ANGOFF may have total recall, but I have proof positive that H. L. Mencken praised *Reader's Digest* in print in September 1934. Quite contrary to Mr. Mencken's sentiments as expressed in Mr. Angoff's alleged conversation with the great editor [SR, Aug. 10], the following statement by Mencken appeared in *Reader's Digest* of above date:

"When the *Reader's Digest* first appeared in 1922 I was editing a magazine myself, and hence had only a pale and ineffectual interest in magazines edited by others. For two or three years I probably no more than glanced at it. But then, one day, I noticed that the table of contents led off with an article taken from my own magazine, and I naturally looked inside to see what had been made of it. What I found really astonished me—and I should add, considerably embarrassed me. For here was an article that had run to 4,500 words as I had printed it—and the *Reader's Digest* got everything that was worth reading in it into 1,500! Not an idea was missing. And not a phrase of any importance whatsoever. Such discoveries are not exactly pleasant, but they at least have some use. I began reading the *Reader's Digest* pretty regularly after that, and in the course of time I learned a great deal that was new to me about the art and science of copyreading, though I had been practicing it for twenty-five years. I believe that it can be done much better than it is done in most American magazines, and I point to the *Reader's Digest* in proof. The rest are far too wordy, far too windy. There is too much in them that is mere writing against space. The evil system of paying for manuscripts—at least usually—by their length is probably responsible for that, but whatever the cause, there is an effect. The best articles in all of them are gathered together in the *Reader's Digest*—and boiled down to 1,800, 1,500, or even 1,000 words. I have yet to encounter one that was seriously damaged by the process. And I can recall dozens that were palpably improved."

HENRY J. FREYLIKER.

Manhattan, N.Y.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Alfred A. Knopf, one of the founders and first publisher of *The American Mercury*, has reported to SR that statements in Charles Angoff's article, "Mencken — Prejudices and Prophecies," having to do with the early negotiation between *The American Mercury* and *Reader's Digest* for reprint rights, are contrary to fact. Mr. Knopf states that he and not Angoff negotiated with RD and its founder, DeWitt Wallace. Mr. Wallace also has written Mr. Knopf as