

creep into the text to offer glimpses of the author's early mentors. S. J. Perelman comes to mind when Philip Benjamin writes: "... we talked of Trivia, a small emerging nation in Central Africa." And the arrival scene at McMurdo Sound, when their vehicle driven by a Lieutenant Partridge goes dead, offers a bit of dialogue out of the heyday of the Marx Brothers:

"Guess we ran out of gas," Partridge said.

"Come now," Santelli said, "that's an old dodge."

In spite of the fact that I was slowly freezing to death, I managed to gasp, "It looks more like an old Ford to me."

Despite the predictability of how all the high jinks must come out, and despite the familiarity of this type of novel, *Quick, Before It Melts* makes for a pleasant evening's reading. It is not "a very funny novel," as the publisher insists on labeling it, but it is fun.

—HASKEL FRANKEL.

Nanny and the Moonrakers: Pamela Frankau may not have meant to offer a guessing game as bonus, but the reader of *Sing for Your Supper* (Random House, \$4.95) will enjoy deciding whose story is to be continued in the next two volumes of the projected trilogy, *Clothes of a King's Son*.

One suspects it will be one of the male characters. Out, then, must go the nanny, Blanche Briggs, whose beautifully understated emotions at the beginning and the end of a fateful summer form the opening and closing scenes of the novel. Out also go Rab, the touching young American tomboy, and her mother, Paula, who become Nanny's charges in a real sense during the brief and intense period at the seaside.

This leaves Nanny's employer, Philip Weston, and two of his three children, for whom Nanny has always provided, during school holidays, their only sense of safety. Philip, a sort of upper-class version of the Entertainer, is chief actor and playwright of a makeshift revue called *Moonrakers of 1926*, currently running at the Fundrome on the pier. Though his lightning shifts of personality are understandably presented, he is clearly not the author's hero.

Each of Philip's children deserves a full-scale study. Sarah, like her brothers, is secretly struggling with a problem created by essential homelessness. She has a history of vulnerability to young women who seem to be all that she is afraid she will never become; and she falls in love with an "artiste" in her father's company. Gerald, the older brother, imaginative, witty, sympathetic, is torn between the Oxford education his talents demand—now made possible by



"—Now, taking a look at this morning's traffic situation, all highways leading into the city are jammed and moving very slowly, with considerable delay at the bridges and tunnels. Traffic is at a complete standstill on the expressway as a result of construction and there's a major tie-up on—"

his father's marriage to Paula—and his own private compulsion to fill his pockets with cash by methods out of bounds for gentlemen. Even at sixteen he seems too lost to be chosen.

So only Thomas is left—a square-looking ten-year-old with tousled yellow hair, uncommunicative most of the time but prone to sudden violence when his loyalties are in question. His problem is how to deal with the occult gifts he has inherited from his grandmother. The supranormal phenomena discreetly revealed by the author suggest a future with enough peril and possibility to fill a trilogy.

Miss Frankau, a conscious craftsman, has presented a cast of characters who never once speak or act out of key with what they are: servant or aristocrat,

child or adult, or (most difficult of all) British or American. In her autobiography, *Pen to Paper*, Miss Frankau describes a novel in progress as a "mountain to climb, with a story line like a rope made fast to a belay on the other side." Whether or not the most inspired works are written with endings so firmly forecast, Miss Frankau here climbs steadily to a superb one.

Nanny has said an outwardly calm goodbye to her children as they are swept off to dubious prospects in America. After stopping to pick up nightgowns to mend for a lady to whom she is a supercharwoman during her off-seasons, Blanche makes her quietly agonized way home, where there awaits her what no reader can fail to recognize as the one gloriously right eventuality.

—HOPE HALE DAVIS.

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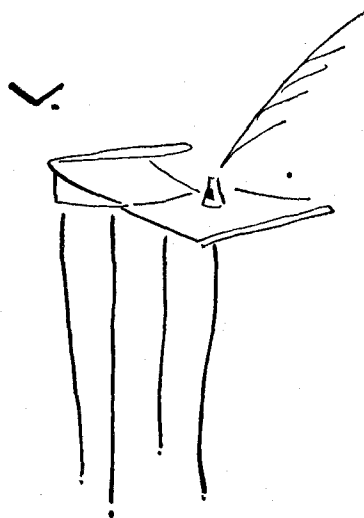
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that we no longer deserve a Mark Twain, wouldn't know what to do with him. But it is some consolation that we are not likely to be embarrassed by a smart aleck of that caliber for another millennium or so. It takes an enormous fund of social generosity to generate a Mark Twain. And to develop properly, the infant Clemens must be born at a time when it is customary for a man to look another in the eye, and, occasion offering, spit in it. Not quite the atmosphere in which we live and move and have our being, *n'est-ce pas?* Generosity? We are the people who have enough unsalable butter rotting in storehouses to butter up China and India, but dare not give the stuff away. Ditto corn and wheat in our ever-abnormal granaries. For that matter, we dare not give it to our miners in Kentucky, nor to our schoolchildren. As for independence of mind, in our time that particular breach of good manners is chargeable only to the lunatic fringe. When we hear the adventurous young praise the drugs that are credited with "extending the frontiers of consciousness," we say, "What consciousness?" And at that, there is a grim comedy in the spectacle of vigorous youth trying to live on chemical visions, turning, in the desperate boredom we have bequeathed them, to a regimen of spiritual hydroponics. It is another unwitting advance in the direction marked by canned food and canned thought, toward the ultimate goal of canned sensation. There is comedy in it, but not the kind that breeds humorists.

In compiling *The Complete Short Stories of Mark Twain*, *The Complete Humorous Sketches and Tales of Mark Twain*, and *The Complete Essays of Mark Twain* (Doubleday, \$4.95 each) Mr. Charles Neider was under the painful necessity of cutting up perfectly good books like *Roughing It*, *Life on the Mississippi*, and *The Innocents Abroad*, and at first one is inclined to curse him for his pains. But he has a point, one that goes some way toward justifying the disease of the age, the anthological passion, the jackdaw lust for bright fragments, the packrat enthusiasm for orts and scraps of printed matter. Given that sickness of ours, it is convenient to have the essay on the German language, the speech before the New England Society, and the critique of James Fenimore Cooper where we can lay reverent hands on them at once. Yet who could have guessed that Tottel's *Miscellany* would be the pattern for the dominant literary form of Western civilization in its decline? Our acquisitive instinct and our

ignorant eclecticism both have their monument in the anthology. But, "The gods are just," says Edgar, "and of our pleasant vices make instruments to plague us." When, after a long course of anthological riot, our brains are melted quite away, Mr. Neider will have no scope for his labors. Then, too, will the wicked cease from troubling—or at least Messrs. Doubleday will not have three volumes of Mark Twain to adorn with folksy dust-jackets. Do we really deserve those dust-jackets? Are we as dumb as we look? I suppose we must be, for if we were smart enough to refuse books so jacketed, publishers would not be turning them out.

Shaw, Wells, Chesterton, Belloc—all of them were characterized by an extreme assertiveness and pertinacity, and



all of them could lay claim to the comic spirit. Mark Twain's mind was no less pugnacious and insistent. His style is deliberately repetitious, stubbornly incremental; his humor is most often expressed in an implacable worrying of the subject that would be intolerable if it were not managed with such art. Half our pleasure in reading him comes from the tension he generates in us by repeatedly assaulting his theme, to the point where our nerves are worn and ready to quit—and then he produces the verbal or logical surprise that releases all tension in laughter. Not to mention his linguistic gift, and in particular the exquisite verbal tact that allowed him to use the colloquial language, in dialogue, narrative, or exposition, with all the delicacy of literary diction. What distinguishes the colloquial from more formal language is the relative intensity of the latter that fits it for the uses of art, which lives by tension. But Mark Twain infused into the flaccid language of common speech, with its waste motion and fits and starts,

the tension required for art. In this respect his prose is as muscular as poetry.

All of which suggests what is wrong with "pop art"—wrong, that is, in addition to the assumption that easy does it. Once we get over the surprise of seeing the objects of our debased material culture isolated, framed, and offered to our contemplation as art, there is no intrinsic tension to hold us. Packaging and advertising are cast in the slack colloquial mode, and a genre that reproduces the package and the ad-copy, or the mass-produced and characterless artifact, simply does not have the stage-presence to hold our interest. There is, of course, an element of social criticism in pop art, but it is too crude to be illuminating. Whatever vitality this kind of un-art possesses comes from the fact that it parasitizes the art of the past. That is, we have certain expectations based on our experience of art—we expect, at very least, to be interested—and for a while we stare hopefully at the work of un-art, waiting for something to happen to us. The hungry sheep look up, and are not fed. Then, if they have as much sense as sheep, they make for where the grass is. As Mark Harris says, easy does it not.

Where did Mark Twain get the energy to do it the hard way? From an inexhaustible fund of anger, it seems to me. He was a splendid hater, and his exuberant spleen sometimes led him into grotesqueries of judgment and accusation that were worthy of him only in their monumental scale. He devoted an entire book to a sonorous anathematizing of Christian Science. He detested the French, on the ground that no decent nation would have delivered up Joan of Arc to the executioner. But mainly he was a civilized man, and the murder working in him he turned to satire and ironic castigation of human stupidity—the moral equivalent of war. "I will not cease from mental fight," said Blake, and Mark Twain might have taken the line for his device.

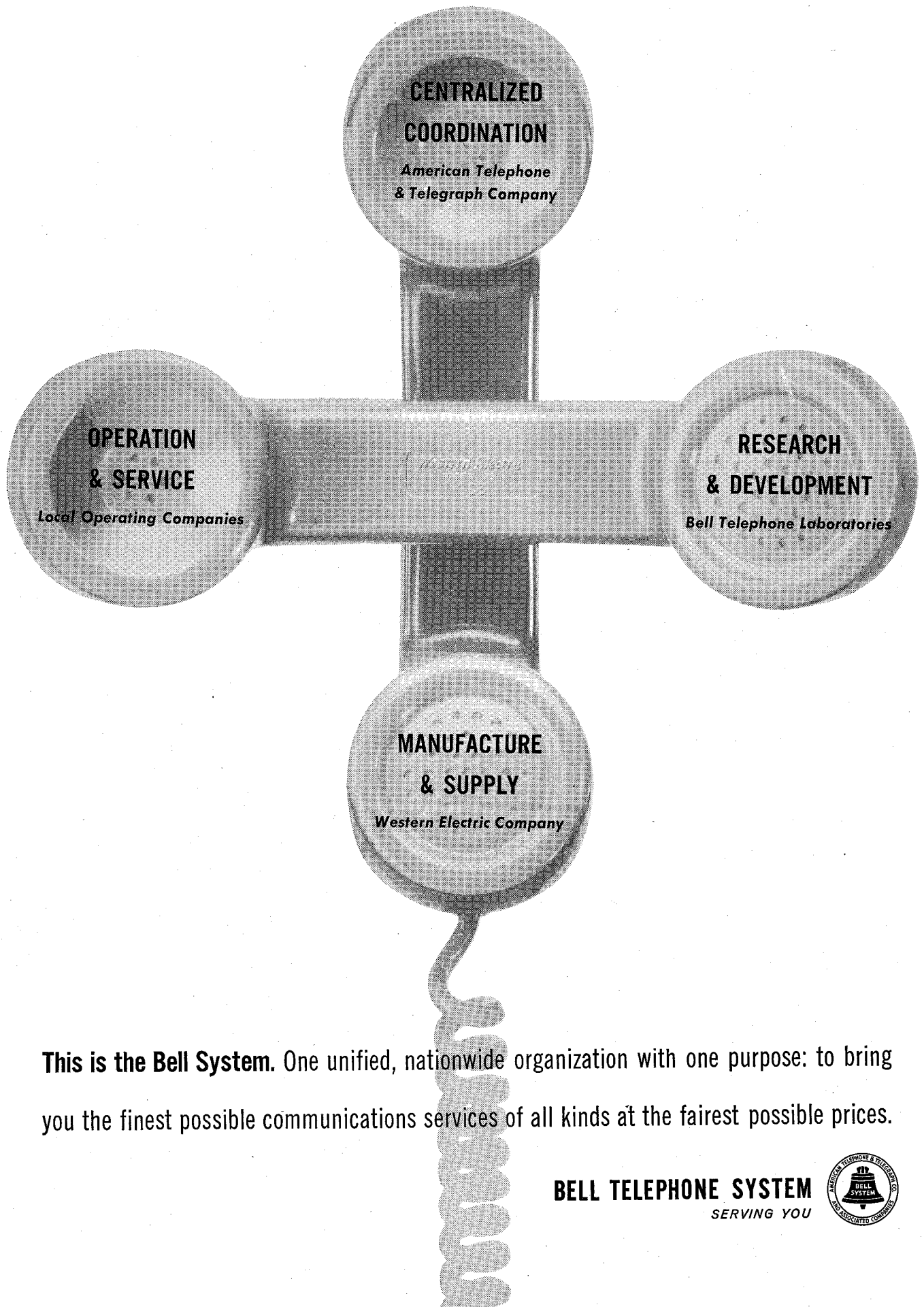
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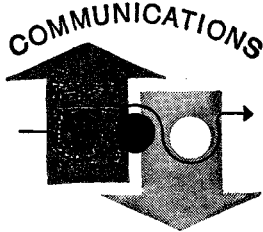
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The Sunday Paper Is Here to Stay

THE DIFFICULTIES encountered in recent years by supplements to U.S. Sunday newspapers were dramatized for all of us recently when that famous old Hearst Sunday newspaper insert, *The American Weekly*, gave up the ghost. Other nationally distributed Sunday supplements have announced regional editions and whole new editorial formats designed to hold on to the largest weekly circulation in this country. Comic sections in color, once the very identification of the American Sunday press, are radically altered of late. The trend is definitely toward the local Sunday paper, in format and content, with emphasis on that word *local*.

What has happened, of course, is that first radio and then television cut deeply into the newspaper business's income from national advertising. It has been said many times that all advertising is local in its effect, and it is obvious that the future of the newspaper in this country is at the local level. Attempts by the *New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal*, among others, to establish a truly national newspaper have not yet succeeded except where the information is of a specialized nature, as in the case of the daily, regional *Wall Street Journal*, with its excellent and exclusive tabular matter and behind-the-scenes financial news coverage. The Western edition of the *New York Times*, never a great financial success, has just been given up by the home paper. Yet the *New York Times* itself, in its indigenous area, continues to expand and prosper, as most local print media are continuing to expand and prosper at the specialized and local level.

The fundamental reason for this is that a local paper, daily or Sunday, does not have to depend entirely upon national advertising, though national advertising is important in its final product. In other words, whereas big national magazines of general circulation have had their hands full with TV competition, as have Sunday supplements distributed nationally, the local Sunday paper has been doing very well indeed, as final lineage figures for 1963 will make eminently clear.

Americans apparently still read their Sunday papers thoroughly and look forward to them. Elmo Roper recently made a survey of Sunday habits in America and came to four conclusions: 1) Sunday is a good day to reach people; they are relaxed and receptive; 2) what they do and think on Sunday has a tremendous bearing on consumption of certain types of products; 3) readers believe that advertising adds value to their Sunday newspaper; 4) the Sunday newspaper is the best way to reach people through print, and the only way to reach them early in the day. Mr. Roper found that, while 71 per cent of American families watch television on Sunday, only 10 per cent are morning TV viewers. On the other hand, of all who read a Sunday paper, 56 per cent are morning readers.

In other words, the local Sunday paper continues to be a highly potent advertising medium because it comes at a time when readers are not distracted, when they are relaxed, when they are talking over family plans and purchases, and when the enormous competition of network television is not an important factor. Mr. Roper finds that more than 30,000,000 families