

TELEVISION

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The Athenaeum Society is, as its constitution proclaims, a literary society. Supposedly it is composed of the more erudite, socially aware men in the community. It would seem that such men would surely be persons who would appreciate and recognize important developments in American society, and who would write papers on these subjects. Such, however, has not been the case.

For the average American, the most important modern day invention, with the exception of the automobile, is unquestionably television. Television is more than a new and better way to communicate. It has caused a literal revolution in the way Americans live. It has been frequently condemned, frequently lauded, and this paper will do a bit of both. Certainly, however, television is a subject of tremendous importance.

There are ^{more than 60} ~~probably 50~~ million TV sets in the country

today. It has been estimated that each set is on for an average of about five hours per day. Over 90 per cent of American families have television. In sheer quantity alone this potential is immense. The movie, "Gone With The Wind", has been showing in theatres for almost thirty years. ^{as the most popular movie in} It ~~has been~~ seen by more ^{history having been seen by} persons than any other movie ~~—~~ about 30 million ^{people} many of ^{two,} them of course, people who have seen the picture/three or more times. ~~It is the most popular movie in history,~~ yet a run-of-the-mill TV show like the Miss International Beauty Pageant of

last Saturday night claims^{ed} for itself 60 million viewers, and that is 60 million different people -- no "repeaters" here. Television has, ~~more than any single thing,~~ contributed to the development of a broad American culture, cutting across regional and sectional lines. It is creating a national language. ~~It~~ It is regarded by many as a new and terrifying world fraught with possibilities for propaganda and manipulation.

And yet, as a subject worthy of presentation as an Athenaeum paper, it has been overlooked by the members of the Society and by the very persons one would think most likely to notice the subject. Charles Wade, for example, is an engineer, and one would think that he would be interested in writing a paper explaining the technical mysteries of television, ^{the} modern electronic day/miracle that permits the diapered toddlers of today who can push the "on" button of the family TV set to actually realize a dream of mankind for a thousand centuries, to actually perform feats that previously ^{were} ~~were~~ possible only in the realm of clairvoyance or parapsychology, to actually see things as they occurred hundreds or thousands of miles away. But Charles Wade was not interested. The last paper he delivered to the Society was devoted to the thesis that last year's Northeast power black-out was caused by visitors from outer space refueling the anti-gravity motors of their flying saucers by stealing ^{electricity} ~~current~~ from Consolidated Edison.

(who was for most of his life)
Jack Boxley, also has a good technical background -- good enough at least to run a fair to middling City water system, but his papers for the Society have not touched television at all.

His first was on the theory of evolution and was considered pretty good until it was pointed out in the discussion by *Gladstone Hooper (he of the great recall)* ~~Jack Henard~~ that the paper had been copied verbatim from an old Life Magazine. More recently, Mr. Boxley's papers have run to local technological matters-- the history of the Hopkinsville Water Works. There are those who say that Mr. Boxley wrote only one paper on the Hopkinsville Water Works, but I have learned so much about the local Water Company from Jack's Athenaeum papers that I am sure there must have been at least three or four of them on this subject. In short, the technically gifted among us have ignored the momentous subject of television.

And the humanists and social scientists have done no better. I remember how eagerly I awaited the first paper of Dr. Thomas Riley, the Director of our Community College. Surely, I thought, a man like Tom Riley won't overlook a subject like television; but I was wrong. Dr. Riley wrote a paper entitled "Hopkinsville, April 20 - April 27, 1912". All Dr. Riley had done was to go to the New Era files for that particular week, copy down what was happening in Hopkinsville at that time, and read the results to the Society. The paper was quite boring to everyone except Wallace Henderson, Sr., who had personally been present at every single one of the incidents mentioned in the paper.

I have been particularly disappointed in our historians. They have ignored television, a subject of tremendous historical and sociological significance, for what, in their opinions at least, are more serious topics. William Turner, for instance,

seems possessed by some mania for cataloging the history of the local schools, provided, of course, that the school in question is now defunct and ^{the longer the better} ~~no longer in existence~~. He has favored us with a ^{lecture} ~~paper~~ on the old Clay Street School, which has been gone from the scene almost as long as Rameses II, as well as with a recent paper on South Kentucky-McLean ^(Linn) College. This last named paper contained a wealth of detail—the exact number of the Deed Book and page where the deed to the original college property ^{is} ~~was~~ recorded; the exact height, width, length, and number of bricks in all the buildings; the names and addresses of all the graduates, plus the names and addresses of all of the descendents ^{of} ~~and~~ all of the graduates. A man of such ^{thoroughness} ~~assurance~~ should write on a subject like television, but instead William has promised us a paper on Bethel College, although this project will ^{undoubtedly} have to be postponed for at least another generation, since Bethel folded up a mere three years ago.

Even more ~~app~~alling was the attitude of Brooks Major. I thought, ^{that he} ~~this~~ of all our members ^{would be} ~~is~~ the person to write a paper on television. Brooks is a minister of the gospel, a Ph.D, and a professor of history on the university level. But he deserted the field of real history entirely ~~in his most recent paper~~ and gave the Society a paper on the Bell Witch, the famous local ghost, and then tried to make the thing sound like history by methodical documentation to various legends, myths, hoaxes, half-truths, distortions, and down-right lies.

So it seems that if the Society is to be given a paper on a subject as important as television, it will have to be done by one of the lawyers in the Society, although I know that by so doing I will ~~submit~~^{subject} my profession to a great deal of criticism here tonight. The majority of the Society feels that the lawyers are even now ruining the Society, and tonight may give these persons more ammunition. ~~Some members, however, are more charitable to the attorneys. One remarked to me a month or so ago that he didn't have any prejudice against lawyers; that many of them were quite fine persons; that some of his best friends were lawyers, but that, nevertheless, he still would not want his daughter to marry one.~~

So much for the preliminaries. It is time to begin to examine our subject, television. ~~This will not be a technical paper. To paraphrase Abraham Lincoln, I could not write one if I would, and would not write one if I could.~~

Let us look first at the good things about television. And let not critics deceive you; there are many things that TV does darn well.

The thing TV does best is ^{something that} a program where the audience is able to participate in the unfolding of the show; ^{utilizes the spontaneity of the medium} ~~cases where the spontaneity of the medium is best utilized;~~ ^{that is} Actually, live telecasts of events actually in progress, ~~are the best illustration of this:~~

Although as Bud Hudson and some of the rest of you know, I may be prejudiced, I believe that sports ~~events are among the~~ ^{programs are}

a good illustration of this.
~~examples of this type of thing.~~

For example, ten years have now passed since that October afternoon in Yankee Stadium when New York pitcher, Don Larson, pitched a perfect ball-game, -- (no hits, no runs, no walks, no errors, nobody on base) against the then Brooklyn Dodgers, but I doubt that anyone who saw that game on TV will ever forget it. The mounting tension as Dodger after Dodger came to bat and was retired. Finally twenty-six men in a row had gone down. There were two outs in the 9th inning and pinch-hitter Dale Mitchell was at the plate. The count ran to an agonizing 3 balls, 2 strikes. The tension for the 80-odd thousand persons in the ball park and also for the countless millions watching on TV had reached a peak. It was a moment the greatest movie directors of all time would have given anything to have created, but Alfred Hitchcock, John Huston, David Wark Giffith, and all the other great impresarios could not have done so, for this program was being produced by a director greater than all these men put together -- REAL LIFE. The moment of truth had arrived. Larson took the short-stretch, no-wind-up ~~start~~ ^{stance} that was to be widely copied for a time thereafter and fired the ball toward the plate. Mitchell watched it go by. A split second later the umpire's right arm shot skyward ~~beginning~~ ^{beginning} the signal for a strike, and Don Larson, an unknown pitcher both before and since, had carved for himself a niche in sporting history.

The aftermath of this was even more typical of TV at its best. Everyone went wild; but I believe the moment will be longest remembered from one single scene. Squat Yogi Berra, the Yankee catcher, raced jubilantly toward the towering Larson, and, without doffing any of his catching gear, leaped up on Larson, encircling Larson's waist with his legs. Such a display of emotion would have been labeled, and properly so, "corny", if it had been called for by a script; but here there was no script. It was what actually happened, and no one could deny its genuineness.

There may be some of you in the audience who are not sport fans, ~~me~~ for example, George Boone; who may not be impressed by ~~the above~~ ^{this} example of TV at its best.

But few could fail to have been moved by the way TV handled the events immediately after the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. The assassination itself was an event of tremendous import and this of course heightened what was to come. I doubt that anyone here tonight will ever forget exactly where he was and what he was doing at the moment he heard that John Kennedy had been ~~shot~~ ^{killed}. The nation paused in its tracks to follow the events that were to unfold. ^{OMIT} [The brief wait, hoping against hope that the President had not been seriously hurt by the bullet from the then-unknown assassin. The shocked hearing of the final verdict a few minutes later, a verdict that was known in advance to almost everyone who had the slightest knowledge of what a high-powered rifle bullet could do to the human brain. Then the immediate rush of events -- the search for the assassin, the

that the ^{murderer} man had been caught and that a death penalty verdict was certain. The return to Washington of the new President, Lyndon Johnson.]

And, make no mistake about it -- television was there. All regular programs had been canceled. It would be three days before a commercial would be heard. And since television was there, you and I were there too.

Many of us were watching our TV sets on Sunday, November 24, 1963, when Lee Harvey Oswald was being moved from the Dallas police station. (I was not. As a Benedict of only one week, I was escorting my new wife to her hometown church,) But many of you and millions of other people actually saw on television, ^{live} level a murder committed. Oswald, handcuffed, and walking ^{among} between a group of detectives, was suddenly accosted by a short man in a hat -- later identified as Jack Ruby, ~~the owner of a Dallas strip-tease joint.~~ Before anyone could react, except ^{Oswald} Oswald, who recoiled from Ruby's advance in fear (or was it, many would wonder later, in recognition), Ruby had gunned down the accused assassin of the President. It was an electric moment, and millions shared it through television.

Later there were ^{some} thousands who laid ^{on television} the blame for the ^{murder of} Oswald ~~murder~~ and perhaps the blame for some of the uncertainty still surrounding the Kennedy assassination, ~~on television.~~ These ^{persons maintain} people ~~claim~~ that the incessant demands of the ^{television} TV camera men for a live telecast of Lee Oswald ^{permitted} permitted the Dallas police to bring Oswald to ^a this semi-public place, a place where in the rush and confusion Jack Ruby could strike before he was noticed.

These persons add that had it not been for the ^{desire} ~~decision~~ of the TV camera man to get a good "front view" ^{shot} of Oswald, he would have been surrounded by officers, that is, shielded on all sides, including the front, and Ruby could never have penetrated ^{such} a shield, and probably would not have even tried.

~~But television was in there in performing its magnifi-~~
~~cent role in the days following the assassination.~~ The funeral of John F. Kennedy was covered in its entirety ^{by film} and a moving experience it was. ^{omit} ~~Who~~ can ever forget the picture of Jacqueline Kennedy and her children at the bier of the President? Who can ever erase from his mind the sad refrain of the ^{Naval} ~~Sailors'~~ Hymn, which was played over and over again for the departed President, an old Navy man. ^{who will ever forget} The sight of the riderless horse with the boots turned backwards in the stirrups; the horsedrawn caisson bearing the casket of the President; the long line of digni-
^{marching to Arlington Cemetery to the muffled drum-beats of} ~~aries in the procession~~, ~~Haile Sellassie, Emperor of Ethiopia,~~ ^{of Ethiopia} the Lion of Judah, who for over three decades has ^{managed} ~~managed~~ to be at the center of affairs of great international significance; tall Charles DeGaulle, President of France, who had been a thorn in the side of the young President, and would remain one for his successor, and throughout it all, ~~the~~ bum, bum, bum, da, da, da, bum, bum, bum, ^{Wagner's} ~~Wagner's~~ solemn Funeral March, and finally the ceremony itself. ^{and then} ~~The~~ ^{final rites in the next Boston} ~~crisp~~ Irish brogue of Richard, Cardinal Cushing, ~~reciting the final rites over his friend and President,~~ Taps, with the muffed sixth note performed by a bugler overcome by emotion. Finally, it was over. Television went back to normal,

Before leaving our discussion of the things TV does well, I think some mention should be made of the Kennedy-Nixon TV debates in the 1960 election, ^{for this is} ~~for themselves~~ probably the most significant single thing that television ever did.

When I say this, I am assuming, ^{(and} I think correctly) that without the TV debates the course of history would have been changed ^{in that} ~~and~~ Richard Nixon President. ^{would have been} I think this would have been a bad thing. Some of you, - for example, Graham Duncan - would probably differ with me, but this is beside the point.

History was made. Before the TV debates, the Kennedy campaign, although splendidly organized, was not getting off the ground.

After the debates, ^{John Kennedy was received with a lot of enthusiasm wherever he went. Furthermore, and on the point of speaking for} ~~the tempo picked up. The Southern Governors and courthouse politicians who were ultimately to provide John~~

^{personal experience, the debates gave Kennedy's campaign workers a tremendous boost in morale,} ~~Kennedy's margin of victory, were brought into line only after the debates had convinced the Democratic party pros that victory~~

was probable. The Vice-Presidential candidate, Lyndon Johnson,

a southerner, was the key man here, ~~and he reportedly, though perhaps apocryphally,~~ told more than one southern politician,

"Since the debates, the polls all show that we are going to win, and by God, you had better be aboard."

Even with the TV debates, the margin was exceptionally close. John Kennedy's popular ^{plurality} ~~majority~~ was less than 120,000

votes -- about 2,400 votes per state, or an average of about

^{one} ~~one-half~~ vote per precinct. A switch to Nixon of ^{about} 20,000 ~~votes~~

Texas votes and 4,000 Illinois votes would have given him the electoral votes to be President.

Before the debates, Nixon was ^{undoubtedly} ~~generally~~ regarded as better qualified and more experienced than Kennedy. After the first debate, most observers felt that ~~at the least~~, ^{at the least} Kennedy had held his own with Nixon and the aura of Nixon superiority had been dispelled.

Many commentators, including such ~~pro-Kennedy~~ ^{partisans} ~~men~~ as Theodore White, author of the prize-winning ^{book} "Making Of ^{The} A President - 1960", felt that perhaps TV itself was responsible for the Kennedy victory in the debates, particularly in the first debate. White observes that, reading ^{the transcript} a cold ~~text~~ of the remarks, there is little, if any, ^{so close} ~~choice~~ between the two debaters. But on TV the contrast was considerable.

Nixon wore a light suit and a white shirt. Although his Republican advisers had ^{ordered} the background ~~for the debate~~ ^{in the studio} repainted no less than six times to make it darker, the gray background was still ^{so light that} ~~not dark enough to keep~~ Nixon from showing up ^{on TV fuzzy} ~~blurred~~ around the edges ^{but} with a glaring shirt. Kennedy, on the other hand, wore a dark suit in which he stood out clearly and sharply ^{against the gray background} and the light blue shirt he wore looked ^{on television} like an ordinary white shirt. ~~on television~~ Nixon's five-o'clock-shadow of a beard was partially covered with ordinary pancake make-up and in a regular photograph would ~~not~~ ^{un-} have been ^{noticeable}. But the TV camera operates ~~electronically~~ in a manner somewhat similar to the x-ray, and Nixon's beard provided a dark and jarring note. Even worse, ^{on one of the occasions} ~~at one time~~, while Kennedy was speaking, the TV camera flashed to

All of the above is, as I would be the first to concede, really trivial when one is talking about the qualifications for a presidential candidate, and these things really should ~~be~~ ^{not have} ~~be~~ ^{mattered.} ignored. But a TV oriented public of ~~more than~~ ^{almost} 100 million people saw all of this, and they were impressed by Senator Kennedy. Were the TV debates absolutely decisive? Of course the answer to that question can never be known, but we all have heard the old ~~poem~~ ^{ditto} about how the ~~country~~ ^{Kingdom} was lost, and "all for the want of a horseshoe nail."

So much for television, ~~the medium~~ at its best. Let us now examine some of the other facets of TV -- its other side.

My time is running short and perhaps I should ^{have} ~~entitled~~ this paper "The Case For Television" or something similar, and quit right here. However, I do not want to leave the august group of persons here tonight with the impression that I am a captive of the Madison Avenue TV executives and ^{unable} ~~unable~~ to find fault with ^{their} ~~the~~ medium, so I will throw a few brickbats to even up the earlier ^{for} ~~earlier~~ thrown bouquets.

The most frequent criticism of TV involves its commercials. ^{First,} ~~As~~ it is claimed that programming is subverted by the sponsors of the various shows. Second, the very commercials themselves are said to be boorish, idiotic and in poor taste.

Commercialism is there all right. Pressure groups are more potent here than almost anywhere else, for they can always boy-cott the sponsor's products. ~~For~~ For example, the long time favorite, the "Untouchables", the story of a ^{former} ~~former~~ Federal Investigator, was started on its way to oblivion by

a threatened boy-cott of the sponsor by Italian-Americans who objected to the show's use of Italian villains. The boycotters didn't explain how the sponsors could have produced a show about Prohibition without mentioning the Mafia, Al Capone, Frank Nitti, and other ^{who were} Italian ^{in the} ~~who~~ ^{era} were actual ~~im-~~ ^{important participants} ~~portant participants~~ in the era.

Similarly, it might be observed that there are never any Negro villains in TV stories. I did observe an exception to this rule a week or so ago, but in this case it was permissible. The show was "I Spy", which features as one of its co-heroes Bill Cosby, a Negro actor.

Even worse than the racial pressure groups are the ones representing the professions. Let a program show a doctor as an abortionist or a lawyer as a mouth-piece for mobsters and the AMA and the ABA are up in arms. According to these organizations all doctors and lawyers are simon pure and the thousands of illegal ^{abortion} operations performed annually ~~in this country~~ and the thousands of thugs and gangsters who show up in court, time after time with the same attorney prove only that there must be ~~mobsters~~ ^{mobsters} posing as members of the medical and legal professions.

A word should be said about the commercials themselves. As a viewer for approximately the last ten years, I believe that generally the commercial as an art form is improving. Only a few years ago most commercials featured a loud, fast-talking, greasy-haired pitchman with a toothy, frozen smile who delivered a rapid-fire spiel ~~about~~ ^{about} the sponsor's product. Little of this

television's ability to picture things. For example, almost every product from cigarettes to hair dye is advertised with beautiful ~~shots~~ of gorgeous outdoor scenery. ^P Another device widely used in the modern TV commercial is the cartoon. This type of commercial is often quite effective. I, for one, think that the Kent cigarette commercial, "To a Colonel, it's a Regiment, to a Smoker, it's a Kent," is quite cleverly done.

Sponsors are also aware that cartoon commercials have a great appeal for children. And a child, if he can be won over to a particular ^{brand} ~~product~~ may become a lifetime ^{customer} ~~purchaser~~ of that ~~product~~. And ^{early} ~~often~~ while the child is small and has no purchasing power, it doesn't do a product any harm to have its virtues extolled by a youngster skipping down the neighborhood sidewalk blithely singing a TV commercial. My own boys, only age two, surprised their mother the other day when during a drive they spied a Colonial Bread truck and screamed in delight, "Old Fashioned Favorite!"

There is one ^{type of} ~~trend in~~ TV commercials which I particularly deplore. ^{This is} ~~These are~~ the family scene commercials. The main reason I object to them ^{is} ~~is~~ that the family father is almost always depicted as some sort of grade "A" boob. A recent example of this is a commercial for ^{an} under-arm spray deodorant called "Right Guard", ~~and~~ widely ballyhooed as the "family deodorant", since "nothing touches you but the spray itself". Originally Right Guard, a product of ^{the} Gillette Razor Company, was heralded as a man's deodorant, but then the makers realized that other family

began with father bellowing from the bathroom, "Where's the Right Guard"? Year by year the commercial supplied a different answer. First Junior had it; then Mamma; then Sis. In the particular commercial to which I refer, however, the answer is different. To Father's query, "Where's the Right Guard?" Mother responds with a sickeningly sweet smile and ^{an a fortiori} tone that might be used in answering for the 20th straight time the silly question of a ^{morose} ~~curious~~ child, "Did you look in the medicine chest, Dear?" Sure enough, there ^{'s} ~~is~~ the Right Guard, and Daddy, the dear dolt, will have barely enough time to spray under his armpits, put on his ^{gray flannel} ~~business~~ suit, and get to his job, a job which must be right lucrative if one is to judge by the Taj Mahal of a home in which this and all the rest of these domestic ⁺ ~~cōntretemps~~ occur.

Mother was the star of the last commercial, but even she often has great difficulty coping with the monumental problems of modern life ^{comes along,} until of course the right product ~~appears~~. Two commercials illustrate this point -- the scenario is almost the same for both ~~commercials~~. A couple of active youngsters are ^{racing} ~~rushing~~ away from the house, ~~sh~~ieking good-byes, loaded down with baseball equipment. In both commercials the mother screams for the children to stop, but to no avail. In both commercials the mothers turn toward the camera, presenting a countenance grim with worry. Each poses a dramatic question. "How", asks Mother #1, "can I get them to eat breakfast?" "How", asks Mother #2, "can I get them to brush after every meal?" Many mothers of

applying the back side of a hair brush to the back sides of the rebels, but the mothers in ^{the} TV commercials prefer more subtle solutions. The children who won't brush their teeth after every meal do so gladly once the proper brand of tooth paste is purchased. The children who won't eat breakfast can be saved from starvation by purchasing a product of the Carnation Milk Company called "Instant Breakfast", a powder which can be mixed with milk in a matter of seconds and drunk on the run by the hungry youngsters.

Our time is running out, but a word should be said about the content of some of the typical programs which are popular today. The top-ranking "Bonanza", a popular Western, cannot be ^{wisely} discussed ~~much~~ by me, since I ~~only~~ ^{only} watched it ^{once}, and that was a year or so ago. That night on Bonanza, not a shot was fired and not a single ^{Indian or} red skin bit the dust, or for that matter, even appeared on the show at all. The plot ~~involved~~, and this, remember, is a Western, ^{involves} a love affair between Hoss Cartwright, a burly, tough cowboy, and the local school teacher. The ending was undoubtedly very dramatic and exciting, but unfortunately for you in the audience, ^{I can't reveal it to you since} I can't remember what it was.

Another very popular show which has spawned several imitators, is "Batman". For the two or three in the audience tonight who don't know ^{about} Batman, I will briefly advise you. Batman is a masked crime fighter, -- in reality, Bruce Wayne, a wealthy playboy who battles the underworld with his sidekick Robin -- in real life Dick Grayson, a teen-age ward of Wayne's. They ^{don't} ~~battle~~ with

~~the most villainous~~
~~bastardly~~ villains in literary history -- the Penguin, who is always armed with an umbrella concealing some mysterious weapon, ~~or handy device,~~ or ^{with} Mr. Freeze, a man who lives only in sub-zero temperatures and battles the Dynamic Duo, as Batman and Robin are called, with a gun that shoots a cloud of gas that freezes everything it touches.

This sounds silly, and it is, but, frankly, I like Batman. The show is cleverly handled by the performers, who play it deadpan and occasionally get off some funny lines. For example, Robin might interject upon the discovery of the ~~treasure~~ ^{hoard} of an antique tiara from the Gotham City Museum, "Holy Mark Anthony, some ~~body~~ ^{one} has stolen Cleopatra's crown."

Having pleaded "guilty" to liking Batman, I know that I am throwing myself wide open to the critics (I almost said wolves) in the audience here tonight, but I must be honest with my audience. I cannot do like Curtis Brasher did in an Athenaeum paper several years ago. Curtis read a paper advocating that the United States return to the gold standard of money. After this ~~quest~~ ^{treason}, banker-like and thoroughly discredited theory ~~was~~ ^{had been} roundly blasted in the discussion, Curtis said in his rebuttal that he had written the paper "tongue in cheek". I might add that a few years later George Draper wrote a similar paper. George, however, did not write "tongue in cheek". His paper was intellectually honest, though, unfortunately, not intellectual.

And so I shall conclude. I await your criticisms and your suggestions. Perhaps some of you will have ~~more~~ insights

into, or solutions for the problems of television that have not occurred to me. At any rate, I consider it likely that the discussion tonight will be at least as good as the papers being discussed -- unless Tommie Morris can come up with a better ^{report} ~~report~~ than I.