

The Future of Advertising

The Nineteenth, and Last, in a Series of Talks on Advertising

It would be interesting and easy, but entirely futile, to make sweeping predictions about the future of advertising. Men hardly have the temerity to speculate upon the future of the law of gravity, or of the fourth dimension. The law upon which advertising rests is, no less than these, immutable, and its effect, for good or bad, is largely dependent upon the degree to which men understand it and the uses to which they turn their knowledge of it.

THE future of advertising is inseparably interwoven with the whole future of commerce and industry. Any prophecy would have to take into account the probable development of our whole national life. But there are many tendencies, already observable, which seem to indicate important progress, and which are likely to influence profoundly the business of the next few decades.

First and foremost, the ethical standard, which has been raised so notably during the past few years, is bound to go higher and higher. Probably no business or profession ever did so much in so short a time to wipe out the stigma of the inexpertness and charlatanism which characterized its early history. Today the honest and the expert are dominant. Tomorrow they will be predominant. And it is a fairly sure prediction that in the not distant future advertising will offer far less foothold to the incompetent and the faker than even law or medicine or other far more strictly regulated professions.

It must be so. For the advertising world is strongly interdependent. In some degree the success of every advertising medium affects the success of every other, because the success of all is founded upon the implicit confidence of the public. The more the people of any small community can trust the advertising in their local newspaper, for example, the more will they trust advertising in the national publications which they read. And *vice versa*.

The outlook is very hopeful. Most easily observable are the efforts of the greatest national publications. These publications are selling advertising space for what it is worth, or less, at an established rate per line, which is never cut, never deviated from, based absolutely on a certain rate per thousand of circulation. They are excluding the untrustworthy, helping the trustworthy, investigating scientifically the merchandising conditions in many lines of industry, conscientiously declining to accept advertising which does not seem likely to succeed, and striving in every way to multiply the success of that which they do accept.

Quite as significant, though less obvious,

is the activity with which the hordes of petty advertising schemes are being lopped off. Business men in many cities, through their boards of trade, are in organized revolt against fake directories, worthless special editions, "programs" issued by misguided social organizations, and the "advertising" whose only purpose is to sugar-coat the pill of blackmail or to disgorge a contribution for some doubtful "charity." Experience with some of these misuses has soured a great many sensible men on advertising *in toto*.

Between the two extremes of big advertising and little advertising lies a wide range through all of which is clearly evident a wholesome spirit of unrest.

Newspapers are rebelling against the free reading-notice, bill-posting associations are pointing to a higher standard of art, printers are studying to make booklets and circular matter more effective, advertising men are forming vigilance associations to prosecute frauds, legislatures are passing restrictive laws. All of these movements mean progress, and rapid progress, toward the end that advertising shall be employed only when it ought to be employed, and only in the strongest and most effective manner.

This will mean the saving of millions of dollars now spent for so-called "advertising."

But there seems no likelihood that the aggregate of advertising expenditures will ever be less. It will be much more. For a proper increase of advertising through legitimate channels will be the result of the reduction of this waste in improper directions. In local newspaper advertising, in honest trade-paper publicity, and in correct national advertising, with their attendant follow-up, we may expect to see the totals mount and mount as present advertisers gain more strength and as new advertisers enter the field.

The new advertisers, unquestionably, will represent many important commodities which are not today extensively advertised.

There are great groups of staples and necessities the distribution of which is in the hands of conservative, old-line firms who have not yet discerned that advertis-

ing is their most economical means of creating and holding demand from the consumer. This is particularly true of the enormous classification of textiles.

Some commodities are, as a whole, awaiting the development of speedier and cheaper transportation, or the working out of other economical methods of national distribution, before they can be heavily advertised in national periodicals. Perishable products, like certain fruits, dairy products and vegetables, obviously cannot be shipped long distances. National advertising would create a demand covering a wider territory than could be reached, and too much of the advertising would therefore go to waste. Heavy articles, like stoves, refrigerators, large pieces of furniture, brick, lumber, and other goods which carry high freight charges, still have a somewhat limited circle of economical distribution. A few manufacturers have already solved these problems, by such methods as establishing branch distributing points; more can solve them if they will seek expert advice, and eventually many of these articles will be strong advertising possibilities.

There are many products which will be more widely advertised when the consumer has been a little better educated. Building materials, for example, are still a good deal of a mystery to the layman. Already varnish, roofing, cement, hardware, wall-boards, some kinds of lumber, are being made known by name to the consumer. As the owners of houses and business buildings become better informed about the importance of knowing the respective merits of the things that enter into construction, the manufacturers will respond. In this field, however, as in many others, the manufacturers themselves can successfully take the initiative in the education of the buying public.

But significant above all is the evidence that advertising in the future may be of great general benefit in making the life of the nation more rational.

For advertising is the great leveler. Faults, crookedness, inefficiency it exposes. Merits, honesty, efficiency it brings to light. It rules by the survival of the fittest.