

## An Advertising Idea from Darkest Africa

In England a large proportion of all the coal tar produced is burned up as some form of fuel.

In America 95 per cent is used in valuable manufactures. One way, at least, in which the New World is less wasteful than the Old.

In one of these valuable uses of coal tar there is a story that takes us into darkest Africa, that gives us an inspiring glance at the persistence of men and a hint of the romance of business.

A certain firm manufactured coal tar products. They had seen great industries made greater by advertising. They thought there must be some way in which they could employ this force, but try as they might, they could not see just how. So they called in an advertising man.

He asked how coal tar was used.

"One thing," they said, "is for making tar and gravel roofs—the kind of roof you had on the ell back home."

These roofs, he found, are made with coal tar pitch and felt. They cannot be bought ready to lay like prepared roofings, but must be laid "on the job" by a local builder or roofer. Right there was disclosed one reason why this firm ought to be in touch with the public through advertising.

There was no accepted standard method for laying roofs. You can lay a poor roof that will look and act all right until after the weather has had a chance at it. The result was that, either through skimping or through mere lack of skill, many roofs did not last very well.

This had two bad effects:

First, owners of houses and buildings did not get as good roofs as they should.

Second, good roofing materials were not being used as freely as they should be, which hurt business.

The advertising man packed his bag and took the train for the West. During the next two months he interviewed about 500 builders, architects, dealers and workmen. He came back—with no recommendation. It looked hopeless—to advertise something that could not be sold all ready for use, but which must be mixed with other ingredients and spread out on top of a building by a third party.

Soon after, this advertising man was taken ill with a malarial fever. After he had tried all sorts of remedies without success, a doctor gave him a certain prescription. It was filled at a drug store round the corner, and it cured him. Being of an inquiring mind, he asked what was in the prescription. The doctor said:

"When Henry M. Stanley went into Africa to find Livingstone, his men were attacked right and left by fevers. The physician in the party, whose job was to fight these fevers, was a Dr. Warburg. By experiment after experiment, under the pressure of necessity, he finally worked out a certain specific, made up of a number of standard drugs. After he had returned to civilization he did what the ethics

of his profession demanded. He gave his secret freely to the world. It was accepted by medical science, and is today published in various standard works of medicine, and is known by Warburg's name. Any doctor can write it, and any druggist can compound it. That's what cured you."

That night the long sought-for idea flashed on the advertising man.

"Why," he asked himself, "shouldn't there be a recognized prescription for tar and gravel roofs, which any owner or architect can specify and any roofer can carry out, buying his materials from any builder? With the right specification honestly followed, roofs would be laid right."

He took the plan to the manufacturers. They consulted engineers and architects. The best methods and proportions of materials were set down in black and white. And, with some hesitation, they began to advertise. What they decided to advertise was not their own materials, but a method, a specification for laying roofs. Their own firm was so large that they could afford to promote the whole coal tar industry, and let competitors reap a share of the advantage.

The first advertising was done in trade and technical papers, to reach architects and engineers, and in *The Saturday Evening Post* and one other general medium, to reach consumers. Circulars and other mail matter were also sent to architects and builders.

Scientific and progressive men are quick to adopt a plan based on scientific methods. They tried the specification, and, finding that it produced better and longer-lasting roofs, used it again and again. And the layman was gradually educated to ask for that kind of roof on his construction.

The increase in the demand for the goods was so noticeable that methods were worked out for advertising other uses of coal tar, one by one. Today that same firm is investing in advertising to the extent of twenty times its original appropriation, and is getting its money's worth.

Let us see, then, what national advertising accomplished in this instance:

First, it corrected a condition in an industry which was suffering because of the misuse of its product.

Second, it found a way to make sure that owners of buildings should get *good* tar and gravel roofs instead of *poor* ones.

Third, it greatly increased the use, for an economical and beneficial purpose, of a product which in England, for example, is generally burned up as fuel.

Does not this show how advertising can be of true economic service to

- (1) the business man
- (2) the consumer, and
- (3) the whole American public?

*The Ladies' Home Journal*

*The Saturday Evening Post*

*The Country Gentleman*

THE CURTIS PUBLISHING COMPANY, INDEPENDENCE SQUARE, PHILADELPHIA