

## ADVERTISING THE RETAIL DRUG BUSINESS.\*

BY J. THOMAS LYONS.

Before we can come to any conclusion regarding advertising we must first come to some understanding as to what we mean by the word "advertising."

You know, I am often told, especially by manufacturers; they will say: "Lyons, we have been in business for several years. We have gone ahead every year and made money all the time, but we have never advertised in any way." I generally reply:

"My good fellow, it doesn't matter how long you have been in business, you have been advertising from the very first day that you opened your door. Every package of goods that goes out of your shipping department is an advertisement for you; every package that leaves your store is an advertisement for you; the clothes you wear; the things you say; the manner in which you treat your fellow-men; the manner in which you walk down the street are all advertisements in the truest sense of the word.

"Advertising does not necessarily mean bill boards, street cars, newspapers, blank walls, circulars, programs, letters, or any one specific thing, but advertising means anything that attracts the attention of one person or of a million people to your business or to you personally as the proprietor of that business, and if the retail druggist could only realize that almost every waking hour he is advertising or *mis*-advertising his business, he would pay some attention to the importance of correct advertising.

"If an efficient man were to be called by a neighborhood druggist and told to do what he could to increase the profits of the business, the first step, no doubt, would be to see if three or four dollars in white paint would not be a good advertisement in the druggist's window. If there was anything about the exterior of the building that might create the impression in the mind of the passer-by that carelessness and slipshod methods prevailed within, that condition would have to be corrected.

"The interior of your store often has an unconscious influence, either favorable or unfavorable, on the prospective customer, and you cannot get correct store atmosphere unless the things therein are right.

"The average neighborhood druggist cannot advertise in newspapers profitably because he pays for the total circulation of the paper, and can hardly cash in on more than 5 percent of the circulation. Many druggists have tried to build up a telephone business, but this has often proved disastrous, because the cost of delivery takes the profit from the sale.

"If I were a neighborhood druggist I would do intensive advertising in my own neighborhood. I think it might be good business for a druggist to buy an invalid's chair to be loaned out to convalescent customers and charged up to advertising. The good-will of a family could be obtained through this method at a very low cost.

"At this time of the year it might be good business for a druggist to have a mail box in his store whereby the younger children of the neighborhood could mail their letters to Santa Claus. This would not only bring the children into

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the store, in most cases accompanied by one of their parents, but it would give you an opportunity to obtain a splendid mailing list of names and addresses for children which could be used to advantage every month.

"I would promote children's contests, outlined pictures to be filled in with ordinary school crayons, the best and neatest design to receive a box of candy each week or every month, and I would get the candy manufacturer to donate the candy, because in return for it I would give him an advertisement in my window.

"I would concentrate on the doctors. I would try to find out when a doctor had a birthday, and every year I would send him a birthday card or any little thing to get his good-will and all the time I would realize the value of advertising.

"I have seen many a druggist who could have spent 10 cents with a boot-black and charged it up to profitable advertising. I have seen many a druggist who could have spent 50 cents with the manicurist or 25 cents with a barber and charged it up to good advertising.

"Sometimes I wonder, is it because the druggist, as a rule, is better educated than men in other retail lines that he apparently is not the same efficient business man? The average neighborhood druggist will tell you that he is overworked—that the public imposes on him—that they come in to buy stamps and postal cards, and yet a retailer in any other line will tell you that all he wants is to get the people into his store and he will take a chance on selling them, and in most cases he does.

"Have you ever considered that when you open a new store you do not create any new business? As a rule, you depend on your success to switch business from a competitor to you.

"Within the last ten years prescription business in the United States has fallen off about 40 percent, due to a number of things. Here in Greater Baltimore we have 480 drug stores serving about 750,000 people, which, at a most conservative estimate, allows one drug store for every 400 families in the city of Baltimore and suburbs.

"Competition has been very keen here, with the result that everybody has been cutting prices all over the town, the greatest cutting work being done in the shopping district. Cutting prices is all right when you are the only cutter, but when everybody cuts down no one has any advantage, and the disadvantage is that most every one does business at a loss.

"Cutting prices in the drug line does not increase consumption. If I buy two tubes of shaving cream, say, for the price of one tube, I cannot possibly use more cream, even though it costs me less money, and you have stocked me up with cream at little or no profit, when it would be just as easy for you to have gotten a sufficient profit from the sale.

"The result of all this cutting in Baltimore, as I see it as an outsider, has been to cause more or less business demoralization, because you have clogged up the outlets for your business, just the same as if you would stop the circulation of your blood your body would decay, and all the cutting in the world will not increase consumption of goods, and no business can go ahead which does not at least stimulate a greater use of the article itself.

"The druggist is a good fellow; the druggist has been imposed on; the druggist too often holds the bag for the manufacturer while the latter gambles in his territory. If I were a druggist I wouldn't put in any line of new goods unless there was a legitimate reason for it.

"If I were selling, say chewing gum, I can't see why I should put in another line of chewing gum unless I would make a better profit for the same quality gum

than the lines already on sale in my store. The more money I put into chewing gum, into cigars, or into any other special department, the harder it is for me to turn over that investment, and my success depends on turn-overs.

"If I were a druggist I wouldn't have anything to do with a manufacturer who puts in his advertising, 'Beware of substitutes.' The manufacturer who tells the public that the druggist substitutes and then expects to get the cooperation of the druggist is certainly as foolish as the druggist who gives it to him.

"The druggist is not necessarily an order taker. He is a business man. He has as much right to sell the public the thing he wishes to sell the public as the manufacturer has to sell the various retailers their own special lines, and if I were a retailer, I would pay especial attention to those manufacturers who were advertising me as a substituter.

"Then, too, a manufacturer desires to put a new chemical on the market. Instead of seeing the druggist he sees the doctor, gets the doctor to write a prescription for the chemical. The prescription is brought to your store, you are going to get 45 cents or 50 cents to fill the prescription, and then in order to fill the prescription you must go to a wholesale house and pay 75 cents or \$1 for a bottle of this new chemical. Nearly all of you have such bottles in your store from which you have filled only one prescription, and you did it at a loss. Before I would be willing to lose money on one prescription, I would call up the doctor and tell him the condition and ask him if I bought a bottle of this medicine to accommodate his prescription, could I depend on him to send a sufficient amount of prescriptions to use it all.

"In fact, success with me is not psychology or sociology so much as a knowledge of salesmanship and being convinced of the fact that I am responsible for my own condition. Once I get the confidence of my trade, I can do anything I want with them until I abuse that confidence, and I would do everything possible at all times to merit their confidence.

"The druggist is an educated man, as I have said before, and the future outcome of his store and of his city depends on him individually and depends on him collectively. If you men will get together here in Baltimore and do what you can to bring about a better condition in the drug business generally, you will all profit, and in the years which are to come it will be indeed pleasant to realize that you built on the granite of character instead of the quicksands of a clever selfishness."

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We are, all of us, whether young or old, famous or obscure, people of influence. We can not live a day without affecting the world somewhat for good or ill, whether we will or no. We are all a part of life's forces, whether we know it or not. Be as humble as you like, you are still a person of influence, if not by your own choosing, then often by God's decree. It may be only a smile or a simple kindness that you have given to a little child, but it starts agencies you little dream of; or it may be some selfishness or lack of honor, some weakness in you that sets in motion a long train of hurtful and sad influences or circumstances. For all life is connected, and whether you wish it or not your life affects other lives.—Anna B. McCall.