

## ADVERTISING.\*

BY W. C. ALPERS.

A paper on advertising written by the dean of a school of pharmacy seems at first sight to be an anomaly, and doubt might be raised whether a teacher could shed any new light on this often-discussed and still vexed question. My explanation—or, if you choose to call it, apology—for presenting this paper at the Commercial Section is twofold. In the first place, I have behind me a long service as a practical druggist, extending over more than twenty years, during which time I have had charge of pharmacies of all sizes and kinds; have been connected with manufacturing and wholesale interests, and have at times conducted advertising campaigns of large firms extending over the whole of the United States. Besides this personal experience, I have for many years carefully watched the advertisements of others, and from this standpoint alone—that is, from the standpoint of the reader of advertisements—it might not be without interest to listen to these observations. Let me speak on this second subject first.

An advertiser is inclined to value his advertisement, and consequently the expected results, in proportion to the time, thought, energy, and expense devoted to it. He ponders for days or weeks over a certain circular; he exercises the greatest care in the selection of the type, the typographical arrangement of the words, the quality of the paper, and other matters that he believes to be of importance. He spares no expense in producing the most elegant circular; he sends it out by personal letter; in fact, he does not neglect anything that seems to make for the success of his advertisement. The results are disappointing. They are in no proportion to his efforts. His disappointment grows into disgust, and he decides that advertising is a useless enterprise, and the money spent for it wasted. At other times he will write up a small circular on the spur of the moment; he pays but little attention to it, but distributes it because he feels that something ought to be done. He hardly expects any results, and, to his surprise, he discovers that every second customer will speak of that little circular and ask for the goods, and results are far beyond his boldest expectations.

When I myself awoke to this fact and discovered that the results were seemingly in no proportion to the effort and expense, I naturally tried to find the cause of this apparent contradiction, and the question arose in my mind: What constitutes a good advertisement? A question that has not been answered satisfactorily to-day, although thousands of experts have tried to answer it, and millions of dollars been spent to discover the answer. An observing tradesman will soon recognize that he must look to the public for an answer; that the success of an advertisement is determined by those who read it, and not by him who writes it. He must read their thoughts and use them so that the circular will sound in their minds like an echo of their own thinking.

Another important point is to fix the object of the advertisement and to be clear on that point. Is it your intention to put new things, new articles, new combinations before your old customers, or do you wish to gain new customers for the things you have had on sale for years? According to these two objects your advertisement must be shaped differently. You can introduce new articles by samples or by depicting results; by bringing their existence again and again to the notice of your customers. Persistent efforts are here needed, and you cannot repeat the same

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\* Read before the Section on Commercial Interests, A. Ph. A., San Francisco meeting.

argument often enough. This fact is well known to the manufacturers of proprietary articles, who will send you thousands and thousands of circulars to be used as counter wrappers and bring the articles to the notice of *your* customers. Unfortunately there are a good many druggists who accept such circulars and distribute them free to their customers, and, instead of training them to look to their local druggist as a source of information on remedies for small ailments, induce them to buy these ready-made proprietary goods on which the profit is generally insignificantly small. If, therefore, such a method of advertising appeals to you, by all means have your own circulars printed and advertise on them some article of your own make.

By these methods new customers are but rarely gained. You reach only those who already deal with you. You must go outside of your store, you must increase the number of your friends and must bring your store, your goods to the notice of people that you did not know before and who do not know you. For this purpose, get a list of people that live in your neighborhood. Use your own ingenuity in getting such a list. Watch over it and correct and extend it from day to day. In large cities you can sometimes employ the boys in your neighborhood. Let them go from house to house in a certain block or a certain street and find out who lives in each house. By paying them a cent for so many names you can soon compile a list of two, three, or five thousand prospective customers, or even more. Arrange this list in two different ways: first, alphabetically, and, second, according to streets and numbers. Write to all of them, or send them circulars, but always word your circular in such a way that it appears as a personal letter. If you tell Mrs. Smith that her beautiful complexion can be preserved for years, and even improved, by your cold cream, it will appeal to her much more than by telling her that John Brown's Cold Cream will remove freckles, blotches, and other blemishes of the skin. If you send John Miller a circular praising the advantages of your digestive pill, he will read it and put it aside, but if you word your circular in such a way as to tell him that the discomfort he felt after his large, big dinner could have been avoided by quietly slipping down one or two of your digestive pills with his demitasse, he will remember it much better. This drafting of a circular to make it appear a personal appeal to the person who reads it is a skill and an art worthy to be studied and practised by every enterprising business man. But this emphasis of the personality does not only refer to the receiver of the advertisement, but, in a much greater degree, to the writer. Whatever he sends out, let it bear the stamp of individuality, and this stamp must be the same, no matter to whom you write or on what subject. All your letters, all your advertisements must have some distinctive mark by which they are recognized; which makes them stand out as a class of their own; which compels attention and comment. A well-chosen trade-mark, such as Castoria, Listerine, and others, emphasizes this truth. But, as it is impossible to trade-mark everything in your store, you should give your circulars a distinctive mark that is the result of brain-work, that represents you in your own individuality. How to impress this individuality on all your advertisements must be left to yourself. It can be done by certain phrases, by certain catch-words with which every circular begins; by pictures of a certain kind, or by many other designs and methods.

It may be worth while to tell you, at this occasion, the story of the success of the manufacturer of one of the best known talcum powders. He was a druggist of moderate means in Newark, New Jersey. I knew him well. At a meeting of the New Jersey Pharmaceutical Association we sat together at Atlantic City, near the beach. I noticed that he was discouraged and despondent. I asked him the cause.

"I will tell you," he said. "I am discouraged because I despair of success. My case seems hopeless. I started this talcum powder expecting great things from it. I mortgaged my store; I mortgaged my house; I borrowed money from all my friends; I know no one of whom I could ask for more. The money is all gone; it disappeared as if swallowed up by a rat-hole. I am at the end of my resources." There was a long pause. Suddenly he jumped up, excited, full of life. "I got it! I got it!" he exclaimed. "I know where I made my mistake." I looked at him in surprise. "You see that," he said, pointing to a fence not far from us. There was on that fence an advertisement of chewing gum, consisting of a long row of heads of the manufacturer; the first one very large, the others gradually becoming smaller. It is a well-known advertisement that everybody has seen. "That row of heads," said my friend, "teaches me what I must do. I must be personal in my advertisements; I must put my individuality into them. I must put before the public something by which they will remember me and my talcum powder." From that day he changed his advertisements, on the tin cans of his talcum as well as on the fences along the highways. Where there had been the figure of a laughing baby, he put his own face, and it was reproduced on thousands of fences and in thousands of journals all over the United States. The sale of the talcum increased from that day and reached enormous proportions. This man discovered the secret of a good advertisement: Put your individuality into it in whatever way you choose.

As a proof of the correctness of this statement, I will show you some of my own advertisements<sup>1</sup> that I used to great advantage when unexpected and violent competition threatened to overcome me. You will notice, these advertisements consist of a small figure with a large head, the latter always being my own photograph, and the figure always represented something seasonable—a base-ball player, the cook, a man in a canoe, a bicycle rider, a man in an automobile, a baby, a skater, a policeman, and so on. From this figure the key to the advertisement was taken, and seasonable articles advertised to the public. The circulars—the paper for which was always of the same color—were distributed every Sunday by the newsdealers in my neighborhood, with the Sunday papers, about 2500 every Sunday. The results were marvellous, and the advertisement so pleasing to the public that a great many of my customers kept a full set of them and often asked me for additional copies.

In presenting these advertisements to you I do not wish to say that this is the only, or even the proper, way of advertising your business. You must follow, in this respect, your own inclination and be guided by local conditions. The point that I wish to emphasize is this: If you adopt advertising as a means of improving and increasing your business, you must not do it in a haphazard way. Have a fixed object in view. Lay out a plan for a whole year. Follow it up strictly and persistently. Do not be discouraged by seeming failures, and, above all, put all your efforts and all your individuality into this work.

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<sup>1</sup> The author accompanied the paper by a series of circulars he had successfully employed, embodying the idea of individualizing the advertisement.