

capsule has been administered will show by the eructation whether or not the capsule has broken in the stomach. If the capsules are subjected to formaldehyde vapor too long or if the gas be too strong the urine may be slow in becoming blue, or may remain unchanged. Capsules intended for immediate use may be subjected to considerably more formaldehyde than may be used on those which are to be kept for a few months.—*Journal A. M. A.*, Vol. 62, p. 197.

THE ART OF ADVERTISEMENT WRITING.*

A. W. BROMLEY.

Advertising is a branch of the art of business, but advertisement writing is a branch of the art of literature. If we could question the men who are writing the best of the advertisements we see in the daily press I am sure we should find that the majority of them have passed to that work from the ranks of journalism, not from business. But the ability to write anything well consists principally of natural aptitude. Training is of less importance and is useless without the first qualification. The saying, "Poets are born, not made," is almost equally true of other writers. This sounds as though the chemist could not hope to write effective advertisements for himself. I do not think that is so. In the first place, it is impossible to write upon any subject without knowing something about it, and pharmacy is a difficult subject for an outsider to master. Secondly, the services of the really good men in the advertising business are not available for small retail shopkeepers in our business or any other. They are nearly all employed by the big agents and engaged upon the work of advertisers who are spending many thousands a year. I have seen the work of some of the self-styled experts, who offer their services to the drug trade, and I am convinced that the average chemist could produce better copy than anything I have seen from them.

Good Writing. I propose first to consider some of the ideals of good writing in general, and then to discuss their application to advertisement writing. You must remember that in writing you are setting the reader a task—to grasp, put together, and consider the thought you are expressing. You can make that task easy or difficult. Just take up in imagination a good but difficult novel of the Victorian period, and a bad but popular one published last year. You may find the former tires you if you are not very eager to read it, while the latter you can go on reading in spite of a gradually developing contempt. The reason is that the newer novel possesses the quality known as "readableness." You will see at once that this quality is absolutely essential in advertisement writing. The man who is reading a novel or a text-book may tolerate a style lacking this merit, because he hopes to enjoy or profit by his reading. But if he is reading an advertisement he has no particular desire to go on; he has only begun because

* Read before the North London Pharmacists' Association.

you have tricked him into doing so by means of a catchy headline or in some other way.

To write clearly you must have, first, a clear idea of what you want to say. Second, you must present your thoughts accurately and briefly, yet completely, and with a sense of proportion, emphasizing if possible what is most important. And you must avoid certain faults which will be likely to distract or confuse the reader. It is to the third requirement that I wish particularly to direct your attention. Suppose, for example, you drag in something that does not matter and does not help your argument. The reader may neglect your argument to consider it. Or, if you make a grammatical error or use a wrong expression, he will stop to criticise it. In either case, his mind is diverted from your argument to something else, and he does not grasp your meaning with the same clearness as if nothing had occurred to withdraw his attention.

Faults in Writing. The chief faults of a bad writer are—using words without considering their exact meaning, using too long sentences, and straining after effect. Some people write without thinking, using stock words and phrases. One of the worst offenders is, strange to say, a professional writer—the inferior journalist. With him a fire is a “devastating conflagration,” an oyster is a “succulent bivalve,” every funeral is a “solemn cortege,” and a pathetic incident is always either a “touching” or a “heartrending” scene. It was a man of this type who announced the death of a celebrity as having occurred after a “short but protracted illness.” Other expressions that would be avoided by thinking what a word means before writing it are “cheap prices,” “very moderate,” “very exceptional,” “unqualified pharmacist.” It is best for a writer who is not sure of his literary skill to use short sentences. There is far less risk of confusing himself and the reader. Always in advertisement writing I would recommend short sentences. Many short sentences following each other have a bad effect sometimes, but only in long compositions.

It is curious how a business man will write a dozen business letters in good English, and then write something for publication containing gross blunders. The reason is that he tries to be clever. I will not say, “Don’t try to be clever,” because if nobody tried to be clever probably nobody would be, and the world would be poorer. But the only cleverness desirable in writing is that which increases the clearness, force, or beauty of what you write.

A common fault in writing is to use too many words. This is called in different cases circumlocution, verbosity, tautology, and pleonasm. Circumlocution is an elaborate statement where a shorter, simpler one would convey the meaning quite as fully. All writing is a compromise between brevity and completeness; circumlocution errs on the side of the completeness. That sounds as though it were a good fault, but it is not; it is one of the worst. If you announce that your purse and money have been stolen, there is no need to mention that the money was in the purse. Legal language is often circumlocutory, but no doubt that is necessary. Verbosity is a form of circumlocution in which pompous language, out of proportion to the subject, is used. Sometimes circumlocution has a rhetorical or a humorous intention, in which cases it is justifiable. A schoolmaster once said to a boy who had left his study door open, “Let, the

guardian of our secrets revolve upon its hinges." Tautology is where the same meaning is conveyed twice in different words; for example: It will cure your cough and drive it away. Pleonasm is the fault of including words in a sentence where the sense is complete without them, as in "They are both alike," "This is the better of the two." Pleonasm is often justifiable; it may make the meaning clearer. But in general superfluity is a bad fault in writing. Try to be as concise as possible. We can all think faster than we can read or speak; therefore, reading and speaking always delay thought. Superfluity delays it still more. That is why pictures are of such great value in advertising. A picture will convey in half a second what could not be conveyed in words in less than half a minute.

Slang to be Avoided. The word barbarism is used to indicate various outrages upon the language. Some would say that all slang is barbarism. I do not agree, but one must be very careful about slang. Consider the character of your composition before deciding to use a slang expression. Slang is inimical to dignity, but it may give vividness and force to a sentence. In general I would not use slang in advertisements. The ordinary writer must remember that he is not entitled to coin words; he must take the language as he finds it. Personally, I regard the use, by English business men of American business jargon, as barbarism—"loan" for "lend," "mail" for "post," "carry" for "kept in stock." "Gent." is an abomination of which tailors are very fond; also I do not like "Xmas" for "Christmas," though it may be used sometimes. A few days ago I saw the word "expensiveless," I hope I shall never see it again. Metaphors and metaphorical expressions are so common and add so much to the vividness of language that we use them every minute of the day. To say "see," and "feel," for "understand" and "think," is metaphorical. Metaphor brings an image to the mind, and the metaphor is bad if that image is a grotesque one. It is also bad if the metaphorical meaning can be confused with the literal one. To say, "He made a fatal mistake in the Minor," is a metaphorical use of the word "fatal," and quite a proper expression. But, "It is fatal to take a baby up every time it cries," is a bad use of the same metaphorical expression.

Ambiguity is another common fault. It often arises from incorrect or omitted punctuation. "William said John is a fool," is ambiguous; it requires either one or two commas. Ambiguity may also arise through putting a qualifying clause in such a position that it appears to refer to the wrong word. "Room to let for single gentleman, fifteen feet by ten." The woman who advertised, "Respectable woman wants washing," may have announced a fact without intending it. The commonest form of ambiguity arises in the use of pronouns. "He said that if he did that again, he would dismiss him at once," is quite clear, but it is an accepted rule that such sentences should not be written. Pronouns must not be used in such a way that the reader has to sort them out, as it were, and study the context to find their antecedents.

Anacoluthon is beginning a sentence in one grammatical form, and finishing it in another. "A hot-water bottle will make you nice and cozy and ensures sound refreshing sleep." Two verbs occurring like that must agree in tense. In this connection I would mention that a short composition must not be written

alternately in the first and the third persons. You must not say, "John Jones has opened the above premises," and later, "I keep only the best and purest drugs." Nowadays the first person is generally preferred for such announcements, but whichever you choose you must keep to it for that announcement. Solecism is the kind of mistake foreigners make. It is the mistake of a writer who knows a language but is inexperienced in the use of it. There are rules which we all observe, but none of us can quote, called Rules of Syntax. They direct us how to make our sentences; we master these rules in childhood without learning them. Solecism can generally be detected at once. We should say, "It sounds wrong," and perhaps the only explanation we could give would be, "We don't say that." Well! that is good enough. A living language is what the people speak, established more by custom than by rule. Remember that writing is subordinate to speaking. That brings us to a golden rule—when you have written anything of importance, read it aloud to see if it "sounds right." The best unskilled writers, and often the best skilled ones, are those who write just as they would speak.

I am not going to deal at great length with the merits of good composition. Most of the points I might be inclined to dwell upon make for elegance rather than force and clearness, and it is the latter qualities that are wanted in advertising. But in all writing, one quality is needed—judgment to decide what is, and what is not, worth saying, considering the object in view. Many a good idea is rejected because it will not be effective as an advertisement. I have seen advertisements containing philosophical reflections. They are not wanted. Get to the point quickly, and save the printer's ink you have paid for, and the time the reader values.

The Choice of Words. And the next great essential in advertisement writing is the habit of choosing the most vivid language possible, without overstepping the border line between sense and absurdity. Short words are more vivid than long ones, specific terms are more vivid than general terms, concrete terms are more vivid than abstract terms, definite terms are more vivid than indefinite terms. Metaphor and simile give vividness. "Icy wind" is more vivid than "cold wind." "Hard as a rock" is more vivid than "very hard." Just compare these as I repeat them: Sank rapidly, sank quickly, sank at once, sank like a stone, sank like lead. The last two are most vivid, because the idea is conveyed in concrete terms. Of the others, you would prefer "sank quickly." I will tell you why in a moment. Now compare these: Has cured many, cures everybody who tries it, has cured thousands. The last is most vivid and therefore best, because it is definite, in spite of the fact that the second makes a more sweeping claim. Again compare: "Relieves all distressing symptoms," with "cures the nasty headache and the disagreeable giddy feeling." The second is better because it is specific.

Even among words which are not figurative some are more vivid than others. Onomatopoeic words, that is words which are an approximate representation of sounds or things they indicate, are the best examples of vivid words—crash, bang, whistle, tinkle, crackle, whine, howl, chatter. Below these, in the scale of vividness, are many words which seem to have at least some sympathy with

their meaning—quick, slow, mournful, terrible, horrible, enormous, tremendous, magnificent, tiny, rush, dash, rattle. All these are vivid because the sound, as well as the meaning conveys the thought expressed. Now consider the little word “very.” It may be described as a word that has failed. It is the reverse of vivid, and it has had its punishment. In every age, probably, we have put aside this little word with a big meaning in favor of something else. Today the substitutes are “awfully” and “beastly,” ugly but vivid words. In the eighteenth century, “vastly” was, I believe, the favorite pseudo-synonym.

How to Secure Attention. An ordinary advertisement has to do three things in succession. First, to secure attention; second, to argue its case; and, third, to give the information the reader will require if he intends to respond. There are many ways of securing attention, but the commonest, and one of the best, is by means of a “striking” headline, which would be better called a “catchy” or “interesting” headline. The inferior advertisement-writer seems to think that any three or four words in big type is a good headline, but a really good headline must be interesting, it must promise to talk about something that will interest the reader. This is where the journalist excels, for it is part of his training to value news items according to their interest. Here are a few of the commonest interests. General—humanity, news, topical, puzzling, humorous. Masculine—success, politics, sport. Feminine—personal adornment, children, domestic affairs. There are also special interests as, for example, a person suffering from rheumatism is interested in that complaint. Now if your headline contains such words as, let us say, man, woman, girl, child, sensation, amusing, mystery, money, fortune, football, golf, beauty, baby, home, or if it contains a reference to some political or other event of the moment, it will catch the eye of hundreds of people as they glance over the paper. Unconsciously they will read on and so get your message. If the argument is a good one, and it appeals to their want, there is a chance that business may result. Now for the argument. Deal briefly and as vigorously as you can with the point or points most likely to appeal to the reader. Don't spoil things by trying to say everything that can be said. And, in choosing those points, the chemist, working day by day at his own counter, has an immense advantage over the professional advertisement writer. Note what questions the public ask, when you push your own specialties at the counter. Finally, don't leave the reader without the information he will want if he is going to respond to your advertisement—name of article, price, and your name and address.

The best advertisements of all are those which appeal to the imagination, because the writer makes use of the reader's brain, and, by means of, perhaps, a dozen words, causes the latter to think out an argument that could not be conveyed in less than a hundred. “Good morning, have you used Pears' Soap?” is, I consider, the finest advertisement in the English language. It makes use of the reader's brain, though not quite in the way I have indicated. Here is an example of what I mean. As an apprentice I used to pass a shop bearing the legend, “Where Maggie got her home for £6.” Think of the tremendous effect that sign would have upon the working-class couple who were prepared to spend, say, £12. They would feel that they were in a position to furnish a

palace—that they had got £6 to spare for luxuries—things that Maggie who, none the less, got a complete home, had to go without.

I have brought with me a few instructive advertisements which I will show you, and we will consider their points. One thing you will gather is this—if you want to learn how to advertise, study the advertisement columns of papers where space is expensive; if you want to see how not to do it turn to those papers where you can get about six inches of double column for a sovereign.—*Pharm. Jour. and Pharmacist (London.)*

THE INTELLECTUAL LIFE OF AMERICA.

While the sum total of American intelligence is undoubtedly impressive, it is more by reason of its quantity than its quality. I mean that the educational system of the country has rather raised a great and unprecedented number of people to the standard of what we in England should call middle-class opinion than raised the standard itself, and that as a consequence the operative force of American politics is middle-class opinion left pretty much to its own devices and not corrected by the best intelligence of the country. And middle-class opinion, especially when left to its own devices, is a fearsome thing. It marks out the nation over which it has gained control as a willing slave of words, a willing follower of the fatal short-cut, a prey to caprice, unreasoning sentiment and the attraction of “panaceas,” and stamps broadly upon its face the hall-mark of an honestly unconscious parochialism. Such, to be quite candid, appears to me to have been too much its effect in America. I know of no country where a prejudice lives so long, where thought is at once so active and so shallow and a praiseworthy curiosity so little guided by fixed standards, where a craze finds readier acceptance, where policies that are opposed to all human experience or contradicted by the most elementary facts of social or economic conditions stands a better chance of captivating the populace, or where men fundamentally insignificant attain to such quaintly authoritative prestige.—*Sydney Brooks.*