

Good Advertising

For Wide Awake Retailers

By F. James Gibson.

Our "Good Advertising" department is to help our subscribers to do better advertising. The gentleman whom we have selected as its conductor is well-known as one of the foremost advertising specialists of the day. Any of our readers who desire the benefit of Mr. Gibson's criticisms on advertisements or advertising methods, or his advice on any advertising subject can have it or both entirely free of charge by writing to him in care of this journal.

If correspondents so desire, fictitious names or initials may be used for publication. But all requests should be accompanied by the subscriber's name.

I WAS recently speaking to a retail merchant in a Canadian country town, who complained of the little interest taken in his advertisements by the people in his locality. The merchant told me that he advertised regularly each week to the extent of a column each in the two newspapers of his town, and that so far as he could see, he might as well throw his money into the bay. The merchant further stated that he frequently changed his advertisements and endeavored to make them bright and readable. I next asked to be shown some of the ads. None were to be found about the establishment, but finally the merchant succeeded in borrowing a copy of the last issue of one of the local papers from a near neighbor. In this paper I found one of the advertisements. It was headed something like this: "Lakeside's Leading Dry Goods Store." After reading the heading, I said: "Is yours the leading dry goods store in town?" Mr. Merchant very promptly replied, "Oh, no! Smith's is much bigger. Johnson's is also bigger, but you know a fellow must blow his own horn." I next inquired: "Do you suppose that any of the readers of this advertisement believe that your store is really the leading one in Lakeside?" The answer was: "No, probably not."

There are plenty of country and other storekeepers just like Mr. Merchant in this respect; they spoil the effect of the truth that they do tell in their ads. by sandwiching in so many obviously false statements. This class of advertisers are not vicious in their lying, but they seem to think that a little judicious exaggeration will accomplish some good, and really deceive no one. This idea is all wrong. That it is wrong morally, no one will deny. But it is, in addition to being morally wrong, a mistake in policy. The buying of goods to the average housewife is a serious affair and not a comic opera performance. Where can I make my money go farthest? is what she is asking herself, and any information bearing on this subject is eagerly sought for. An advertisement of goods for sale is like a merchant talking to his customer, or it ought to be like it. What would be thought of a dealer with a second or third rate store approaching his customers, as they come into his establishment, with: "This is the biggest store in town!" Absurd, you say. Yet, not really more absurd than to say it in print, and it costs less money.

I believe that the drawing power of advertising is greatly injured by this habit of exaggeration, which is not by any means confined

to country dealers. If all advertising were truthful, advertising would pay all advertisers better than it now pays them. It would pay the newspapers better too. Indeed, it would pay everyone connected with it better. Truthful advertising, then, is what everyone connected with advertising ought to aim at.

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Truthful advertising cannot well be induced by terror of the legal code. A year or so ago the Legislature of the State of New York enacted as follows:

SEC. 1.—Any firm, person, corporation or association of persons, or any employe of such or any of such, who in the newspapers or other periodicals of this State, or in public advertisements, or in communications intended for a large number of persons, knowingly makes or disseminates any statements or assertions or facts with respect to his, its or their business affairs, concerning the quantity, the quality, the value, the price, the method of production or manufacture, or the fixing of the price of his, its or their merchandise or professional work, or the manner or source of purchase of such merchandise, or the possession of awards, prizes or distinctions, or the motive or purpose of sale, intended to have the appearance of an advantageous offer, which is or are untrue, or calculated to mislead, shall be guilty of a misdemeanor.

SEC. 2.—This Act shall take effect immediately.

Since that time there have been countless fractures of this law, but I have not heard so far as I can remember of even one prosecution under it. What is everybody's business is apparently nobody's business. In the meantime, the better class of New York merchants and others have found out that exaggeration or other forms of lying do not in the long run pay and cannot be made to pay. This is as it ought to be.

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NORVAL, July 27, 1899.

Mr. F. James Gibson, Toronto:

DEAR SIR,—I enclose you my Spring circular, and, as it will soon be time to prepare one for Fall, I would like to know how I could improve on the enclosed so as to catch trade for a general store in the country.

Yours, etc.,

N. BARNHILL.

Mr. Barnhill's circular is certainly much better than the average. It is 3¼ inches by 5 inches, and this is the wording on the first page:

Our Motto:

"Best value for your money."

N. BARNHILL,
NORVAL.