

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.



ONE of the most difficult things for the amateur advertisement writer to attain is the ability to write naturally. The thing to do is to write just as one talks—that is, if one knows how to talk. I have frequently observed that many men who are good salesmen are poor advertisement writers. Not long ago I stood alongside a salesman in a big New York retail store. I had noticed previously that he was a bright, intelligent young man and I knew that he had made somewhat of a mark as a salesman. On the occasion referred to, I observed that as the people came along he had a winning and otherwise attractive manner. I also noticed that he used plain, common, Anglo-Saxon words and that no attempt was made to be "high-falutin." His words came out easily and convincingly. In very many instances he effected sales. In fact, he was doing well. It occurred to me that he would be a good man to ask about the advertising of his goods. I found that he had some good ideas on the subject and finally I asked him to write up a short ad. dealing with his department. The next day he handed me what he had written. I found, however, instead of writing as he talked, that he had done just the opposite. Instead of using the plain, convincing, every-day language that characterized him as a salesman, he had attempted to use long and unusual words. The whole effect was one of "toploftyness" and bombast. The root of his failure lay in the fact that he lost his naturalness as soon as he took his pen in hand. This is the fault of half or more of the advertisements put out to-day by men of real business ability—men who are perhaps equal to anyone as salesmen and otherwise. But because they try to do something more impressive than usual they make a failure of it. The failure comes because they are not natural—because they do not write as they talk. Of course, there may be the highest art in being natural, as in the case of an actor. But it certainly requires no art in being one's natural self. A man meets a friend in the street and says: "By the way, Smith, I have just opened out a stock of dry goods down in the Thompson block. Give me a call when you want anything in my line. I'll be glad to see you." This is all right. But set that man to write an ad. about his new store. The chances are that he will get off something like this: "John Jones begs to notify his friends and the public generally that he has opened out a stock of staple and fancy dry goods in the Thompson block, where he will be pleased to be favored with a call from intending purchasers." In the one case Mr. Jones is easy and natural. In the other he gets up on stilts and loses his effectiveness.

When you write an ad. write as you talk.

Catch phrases and expressions are great helps to advertising. A phrase or an expression that slips smoothly off the tongue, that's

easily remembered and that is really suitable, is worth many dollars to an advertising man who knows how to use it. Which of us is not familiar with the "grateful-comforting" of Epps's cocoa, or the "best and goes farthest" of Van Houten's cocoa? "Children cry for Pitcher's Castoria" has probably sold many thousands of dollars worth of Castoria. "You push the button, we do the rest," has been adopted into general use by the English-speaking world. It has come to mean a great deal more than its original application to kodaks. But whenever it is mentioned one naturally thinks of kodaks. Who can measure the value of such advertising as this. Hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of ordinary advertising wouldn't begin to compare with it in real value. A big department store, opened not long ago in New York, electrified the city by putting up sign boards all over the place, reading, "Meet me at the Fountain," referring to the big fountain playing in the rotunda of the store. This phrase was also run, and is still being run, at the head of all the firm's ads. So extensively was it used by the firm in question that before three months had elapsed it was the talk of the town. It was copied and parodied by hosts of imitators. It was incorporated in topical songs in the theatres and music halls. It was in almost everyone's mouth. The firm's advertising man who invented the expression more than earned his year's salary (a big salary too) when he hit upon it. Another big New York house has made a great hit with "It pays to buy at Vantine's." A leading Boston dry goods store uses very successfully the expression "The busiest store on Boston's busiest street." Cases of successful advertising catch phrases could be multiplied indefinitely, but enough has been said to show their great value from an advertising standpoint. Let it not be supposed, however, that it is an easy thing to conjure up a really first-class advertising catch phrase. But with enough patience and diligence the ordinary advertiser can probably invent one more or less suitable. But having once found a good one, let him use it for all it is worth.

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One of the snags that beset the feet of the unwary retail advertiser is the entering into contracts with publishers of papers. Many an advertiser finds that he has bound himself down to use a certain space in each issue of a paper. This compels him to use the exact space every time he advertises. Often it happens that he does not really need so much space. Sometimes it occurs he needs more space than his allotted amount. The result is that part of the time his advertisements have a crowded-up appearance and part of the time the printer is compelled to fill the space with big type. It is always best to resist making any contract at all. Say to the publisher that you are anxious to use all the space that you possibly can. Tell him that if he names you his lowest rate you will probably use more than any space you would contract for any way, but that the exact space you will use will depend on conditions which you can't forecast. But if a contract must be made let it be a