

WHAT SHALL WE DO WITH THE FRAUD ADVERTISERS?

IT strikes me that it is about time some one interested in the future of both the publisher and the advertising business entered a protest against some systematic deceptions that now appear so conspicuously in the advertising columns of so many publications. The last year has given us an unusual share of this class of business. Every petty little scheme that the brain of man can devise is worked into an advertisement, and launched upon the confiding public by dishonest advertisers and their allies—publishers. Some of these schemes take the form of guessing contests, rebuses, crayon portraits free, things "given away to introduce them," gold watches for a dollar, and such like. The list might be extended almost indefinitely, and we can always be sure of more to follow just as long as we tolerate and encourage them. They may be classed under the one general head—unqualified swindles.

Every one of these fraudulent advertisements published is a menace to the future of both the publishing and the advertising business. The reader who patronizes such schemes seldom, if ever, hears from his money; and when he gets anything in return, it is sure to be trifling enough to convince him that he has been swindled. Every such experience takes one man out of the ranks of advertising patrons.

Compared with the publisher who runs such advertisements, I have a sort of mild respect for the fellow who invents them. True, he is sacrificing energies and—possibly—abilities in the vain hope of a sudden fortune, which, if properly directed, might return him a permanent business with sure profits and a clear conscience. Yet he makes no moral pretensions and is generally decent enough to hide his personal identity behind an assumed or firm name. But the publisher of his deceptive announcements will preach morals in small caps and double leads, yet print these swindling and nauseous advertisements without a blush. For a paltry dollar he is willing to sell the confidence of his subscribers, and make them forever after wary of himself and his artful advertisers. Some publishers, not content to merely run these "snide" advertisements, give them editorial endorsement.

There could be less cause of alarm if the practise of running questionable advertising were confined to small or inexperienced advertiser; but I am sorry to say that it is not. Many publishers of influential journals seem to think that they can add the income from this business to their legitimate revenue without suffering in other directions. True, there are some notable and worthy exceptions; yet, though on the publisher's side of the fence myself, I must confess that the proportion of sinners is very large.

In this connection, however, we must consider the publisher of the free-distribution-periodicals. These publishers, of course, have no consideration for their readers, and are in it simply for the money they can get out of the advertising column. They have no very fine scruples as to the quality of the advertisements they run so long as the price per line is guaranteed. These publications are largely responsible for this questionable class of advertising, and are exerting their evil influence not only in destroying confidence in advertising houses, but also in reducing, by their unequal competition, the general standard of periodical literature.

It must be clear to every legitimate publisher that it could be to his interest, if every dollar invested in advertising space returned a fair percentage of profit to the investor. It must be equally clear that a reader once swindled, is not likely to patronize the advertiser of the same paper again, if indeed he does the advertisements of any paper, and that the legitimate advertiser's chances of profit and continuance is lessened by every insertion of an advertisement that is intended to defraud the reader. If there were no more worthy object, it would seem that pure selfishness on the part of publishers would be enough to influence them to refuse such advertising. They would do so if they could get far enough away from themselves to look back and see the effects.

If the advertising of the future is going to be what it should be, this question of dishonest methods in the business should have attention. We can look for no help from the cheap publications and free distribution sheets. They are the ones that are making the most trouble, and from their character of purely advertising sheets are not entitled to second-class postal rates. But the publishers of journals with a paid subscription list, and legitimate advertisers, ought to join hands in correcting the evil. It is generally conceded that careful, judicious advertising will pay in any legitimate business. All that is needed is to buy the right kind of space at fair prices, and tell the truth about the goods that you want to sell. Some of our most successful general advertisers are some of the shrewdest business men of the country. They must understand the effect of a "snide" advertisement in its far-reaching influence, and must object to seeing their own names side by side with catch-penny announcements and swindling schemes. They have it in their power to help correct the evil, by refusing to buy space in papers that publish advertisements in which the word fraud can be read between the lines.

If we could reform the "skinning" advertiser, gag the circulation liar, and kill the free-distribution fellows, we would soon be able to get a fair estimate on advertising space, and there would be more money and