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ADVERTISING IN THE U.S.A.

(Address given by M. C. Chessex, on the occasion of the Annual General Meeting of the Swiss Economic Council, on Tuesday, May 17th, 1949, at the Dorchester Hotel.)

America to-day is the biggest smoking country in the world. Every American smokes an average of 100 packets of cigarettes per annum, or a total consumption of some 13 billion cigarettes every year. It is beyond all possible doubt that advertising bears a great responsibility for this national habit. The same applies to the intense consumption of coffee, the chewing of gum and the drinking of millions of 'cocolas. Slogans such as "Good to the last drop", "The pause which refreshes", "Not a cough in a carload", "L.S./M.F.T." have caught people's attention and finally fashioned, by their arresting power, the living pattern of the whole country.

But there are other examples which — shall we say — are far more laudable in the cause of advertising: only to speak of the Scott Paper Company, producer of tissue paper, which cost the public some 35 cents in 1927 before the Company went into national advertising. To-day, after spending 18 million dollars over the years, this same paper is selling at 7 cents a unit. The same applies to light bulbs, gramophone records, radio sets, cars and many a product which, thanks to the power of advertising, has come within the reach of the average American purse.

Yes! Few forces in American life have climbed further or more successfully than Advertising. If advertising has yet to fulfil its final aim — that of conceiving a world of peace and understanding — at least it has performed in the United States a function in practical economics that is still unmaturing in the rest of the world: that is, the creation of consumer demands which, though new and venturesome, are able to be fulfilled; demands which would not occur if advertising did not deliberately incite them.

When, for instance, the first electric refrigerator was marketed (it was Kelvinator), the early public reaction was merely that it was a strange and bizarre sort of a substitute for the iceman and the ice-box. Thirty years of advertising have translated such a novelty into a need that every American family feels. Sanitary napkins, frozen foods, automatic washing machines, baby gadgets, electric razors and, last but not least, television — all these represent new necessities loudly demanded, because indispensable to the American way of living, and it is advertising that has done it.

We have been talking for several minutes about advertising and its fantastic attributes — but what is advertising? Some define it as a substitute for sampling; others say "It's a way to talk to more people than one could in person." Still others call it "The youngest and most daring industry." All are probably right, but the last definition is no doubt the one which will appeal to you because it overcomes the danger of a long discourse on the history of advertising!

In fact the early days of American advertising are certainly not those of which America can be proud. The power of advertising then was abused by un-

checked, extravagant claims and misleading statements. Publishers, at their end, usually claimed whatever amounts of circulation they thought would be believed — and no standard basis of charging for advertising space was existent. Only around 1912 did advertising begin to get its first vision of ethical and standardised practices. The Audit Bureau of Circulation was created to make independent audits of any publisher's circulation. Thus, for the first time, it became possible for the advertiser to know just how much circulation and what kind of circulation he was buying. So if anybody asks you how old American advertising is to-day, you can just reply "Very young but still growing fast." Advertising as practised to-day is a real business — even an art — and the majority of its agents know the value of ethical practice and truthfulness *per se* in their promotional efforts.

Going further into our little story, let us see what an advertising agency looks like. No one who has read "The Hucksters" needs to be told what is an agency; but for those who haven't read it, an advertising agency is a mighty world of account representatives, copy staffs, art departments, media men, research directors, vice-presidents, supertension, frantic race against time and closing dates — and, a commission of 15% at the end as a reward for such a gaudy turmoil. As an ex-JWT man myself, that is to say, an ex-employee of the world agency J. Walter Thompson Co., it is with a certain pride and a real homesickness that I look back at those years spent in the ranks of that gigantic organisation. With a staff of some 2,400 employees and a billing of some 90 million dollars worth of advertising annually, probably no other agency has a more authoritative voice in the field of advertising. Accounts such as Shell Oil, Eastman Kodak, John Mansville, Parker Pen, Ford Motor, RCA, Pan American Airlines, Pond's Cosmetics, Wrigley Chewing Gum, Libby Preserves, Lever Brothers, Kraft Cheese, Scott Tissues, Elgin Watches, Swift's Meat Packing and many others — all these accounts were little infants which we learned to cherish and treasure until they became almost a part of us. As a Vice-President said one day,

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"Each individual problem is so much analysed, so much discussed and so much thought is given to all angles, that the preparation of an ad. and its copy becomes subsidiary."

But don't get me wrong; the J. Walter Thompson Company is not the only important agency in the U.S.A. There are some 1,800 other agencies in the States with five whose billings range above the 50 million dollar mark. But it is a safe bet that there are still a great many more agencies serving local advertisers and consequently not listed in any census.

Now to give you a quick idea how big American advertising really is, here are a few figures. According to the Printer's Ink Advertising Indices, the total money spent on advertising in these post-war times amounts to such staggering figures as 2½ to 3 billion dollars annually, this being spread among some 11,000 national advertisers.

Now why is it that advertising has sprouted in the United States quicker than anywhere else? Off hand I can see several good reasons, but only to mention a couple. First, the United States is probably one of the countries where the weakness of our modern centralised and mechanised economic system seems to be most ostensible. As Stuart Chase pointed out in his book "Your money's worth" the American monetary system is based on the principle of an economy of scarcity — because scarcity creates value — while its modern and super-efficient factories are so designed to impose an economy of plenty. The result of that situation is that the manufacturer must constantly hunt for new needs and stimulate the demand of the consumer so that his output can be absorbed. After all, why should he, rather than his competitor, suffer from this illogical state of affairs? This is why each and every American manufacturer endeavours to create artificial needs and additional demands from the public; and to-day, strange as it may sound, it is that artificial market, created and fashioned by advertising, which to a large extent keeps the American Economy on an even keel.

Another fundamental behind the expansion of American advertising can be found in the people themselves. Healthy, open-minded, confident, romantic and generous, in American people an advertiser certainly has the best audience he could select on this planet.

As Mr. Abbott Kimball, President of the Agency Abbott Kimball Incorporated in New York, said one day, "In the United States most buying is done with the heart, not with the head." So much so that most advertisers have made it their object to exploit to the full that human inclination. They know that it is easier to make American people feel than to make them think; also that feelings are remembered longer than facts. That is why to-day so much emphasis is put on producing an emotion, because an emotion — in the advertising sense of the word — is an interrupted activity and, if I may say so, a generator of feelings. Sometimes expressed in the form of gaiety or pride, sometimes governed by greeds and despairs, these psychological and emotive impulses become in the hands of experience copy-writers the driving force to the buying mood of the consumer.

Other interesting points to watch are the elaborate surveys conducted by most advertising agencies who

know that they can only succeed in their assignment if they move to the front line from where they can put themselves right in the public's place. No expenses are too great if the where, the what, the when and the how of each individual purchase can be pin-pointed on paper. Ultimately these findings permit putting into each advertisement more feelings of the right modulation, more passion of the proper depth, more heart-breaks, more gaiety which exuberates and more of the sentiment which transforms the reader or listener from a passive to an active consumer.

As for the world controversy "Copy or no copy," American advertisers quite definitely favour the former. Of course they agree that illustrations are of primary importance especially as attention-catchers, but are limitative in the sense of human imagination. On the other hand, good copy has this great advantage: it can convey ideas on a wave length far more receptive to people's mental conception. The technique of good copy is to write something which is easier to read than to skip. And one of the essentials of this technique is to mate what the product offers with what the public wants. So much for good copy!

Another aspect which transpires from American advertising in a fabulous way is the importance attached to the know-how of American women. This can be explained very simply: to-day American women out-vote, out-own and out-buy American men. Not only do they buy 85% of all merchandise sold, but most of this merchandise is designed by women, advertised by women and sold to women consumers by women clerks, because most retailers have learned that women better understand what other women want. The fact also that 70% of the private wealth of the nation is owned by women clearly explains why women's opinions — and purses — are far too great to be ignored.

It didn't take lengthy study to realise that fashion expressed in something new and smart could easily, in the feminine mind, outweigh resistance to price. To-day fashion — just as much as sex — has become a tremendously powerful selling force in American advertising. In fact it is used in one way or another to sell practically everything that women buy. No matter how tight the money may get, fashion will keep its magic power and determine what women decide to buy. This so-called "new" or "latest model" selling strategy owes its significance in America to the well recognised fact that it is part of the American way of living to be up-to-date, to possess the new thing, the Buick 1949, the latest television set — in other words, the talk of the town. This explains why fashion has become such a powerful selling tool in the hands of advertising.

But that is not all! American advertising certainly would not have reached its high contemporary levels if it hadn't disposed of extensive and widely circularised means of communications, which in adver-

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tising are called "media." If we break down the 2.2 billion dollars which was poured into advertising in 1943, we see that 36% was spent in newspapers followed by 15% in direct mail, then by 14% in radio advertising — commercials and complete programmes combined — 11% in magazines, 3% in trade magazines, 2% in billboards and outdoor advertising, 1% in farm papers and magazines and, finally, 19% in miscellaneous such as premiums and window displays.

Still in the heart of figures, the Standard Rate and Data Service listed the same year, 12,000 newspapers in America, 1,500 magazines, 250 farm papers, 1,700 trade magazines, 100 publications of other types and 1,250 radio stations, all carrying advertising.

Speaking of magazines which represent the entertaining bulk of the weekly reading diet of Americans, it is interesting to get a quick idea of the fabulous size and circulation of some of those publications; only to speak of the magazine "Life" which appears in four colours pages for a weekly consumption of more than five million copies. Surveys show that it is read by 26,000,000 people each week or $\frac{1}{6}$ of the population. Another important magazine "Time," which is published by the same organisation, reaches a circulation of more than 1,500,000 copies per week, all printed in 24 hours which means at the fantastic rate of 62,500 copies per hour.

In the light of such colossal figures it is understandable that this particular publication in 1947 sold more than 3,600 pages of advertising representing some 18 million dollars. One reason for the success of its advertising promotional department is that they know fairly accurately who reads the magazine and consequently who is likely to be interested in the product advertised. This, mind you, is one of the remarkable helps that the American advertiser gets: quick, reliable and exact information. It is known, for instance, that the vitality of "Time's" editorial content makes it an excellent magazine for well-educated adults and students with a state of mind alert, enquiring and forward-looking. These are usually superior qualities which, in the advertising sense of the word, mean prospective customers worth cultivating for many a fine product.

If any advertiser want to know more about "Time", he need only ask to know. According to a recent survey the typical family reading "Time" averaged an income of \$7,646 a year. 76% of those

families owned one or two cars and 64% of the members of such families went to college, while 93.5% of the families carried life insurance averaging an amount of \$18,000. With such indices and facts on his desk, Mr. Advertiser knows fairly accurately what success his promotional campaign in each individual media is likely to bring.

To-day, we must add to this already extensive assortment of media the television which is growing by leaps and bounds. New stations are opening every day, many of them sponsored and financed by the manufacturers themselves of television sets, to support their growing industry and ensure ever new markets for their increasing outputs.

Well, it's time I concluded; I don't think it is too ambitious nor too audacious to maintain that American advertising has reached a level in its technical development where it may well claim a seat in the ranks of Science. So accurate are the formulas worked out that their simple application leads to results remarkably effective. In Europe, advertising, with a few exceptions, still resembles a gambling game where the artist too often relies mainly on his own personal intuitions. In the U.S.A., on the other hand, the advertising agency uses accurate and excellent formulas which are nothing less than the fruits of years of practical experiences in the field of mass and human psychology. Habits, senses, instincts, tastes, preferences, inclinations can be rated almost to the last digit, thanks to statistical data and elaborate consumer surveys.

For instance, the advertiser may know beforehand the emotive power behind a combination of colour; he is capable of estimating the subconscious power which will transpose the focus of his reader's attention from one side of the page to the other; he can rate in numerical figures the human appeal behind the picture of a pretty blonde girl amorously kissed by a seductive young man, or a dog on the carpet, or a song of Bing Crosby's on the radio, or Gracie Field on the television. He multiplies, adds up, deflates the old folks who have lost interest in those things, and knows fairly accurately before the campaign even begins what will be its success in the form of readership or listening audience.

This is American advertising — something fantastically dynamic, something perhaps dangerous because so effective, something gay and lovable — yes, a remarkable blending of emotion, novelty and fashion.

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