

The Wooing of Men and Things

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No community life has ever come into existence without pressure being brought to bear on people along certain lines, that is to say, without wooing them. The only new features of this wooing today are its scope, its tasks and its methods.

Every community is created and held together by the compelling force of a dominant idea. Nietzsche once said: "Marriage: thus I designate the will of two to create an entity which is greater than they who created it." In addition to the wooing between two human beings — the primal form of the social structure — there exists the wooing in the family circle and of personal friends. At the other extreme of the countless possibilities in advertising is the world-wide wooing of whole peoples.

The extent of the influence exerted by a propagandistic idea depends on its altruistic character or on the indefinable something that formed it. The conception of advertising has from the very beginning been connected with the idea of suggestion. Suggestion gives to advertising a deeper meaning — it permits it to enter the realm of the subconscious and gives it that elemental power which is the necessary requisite of every prophet, artist, statesman, general or other leader of men in any field. This radiation of personality is the highest expression of wooing power. He who has been touched by this magic of personality takes an active part in the shaping of the history of human society.

We have become accustomed to look on that part of wooing which we call advertising as something purely materialistic — something that can be adequately defined in terms of concrete objects and their monetary value. Advertising makes the wares move. The value of advertising is usually gauged by the time it requires to transfer the wares from the hand of the producer or the salesman into the hand of the consumer or the buyer, and by the amount of goods it is able to transfer in this way. Advertising has always existed, but present-day advertising is the offspring of modern technical science.

It is a long jump from advertising by word of mouth or only by the exhibiting of the wares, by description or praise on signs over store or workshop, to the modern rotary press which furnished the technical condition precedent to the development of the press as a deciding power in the world of thought. But it was not until the printed word was augmented by the millionfold reproduction of pictures, the suggestive power of the forms and lines of posters and the brilliance of colors were added, electricity enlisted in the services of advertising and millions of people were enabled to receive the same news simultaneously, that advertising achieved the status of a special art, of an independent branch of human endeavor in these revolutionary times. In the United States of America the art of advertising with its present-day giant dimensions has its cradle. The modest development of advertising in Europe — figuratively speaking, the size of an ordinary newspaper — was not sufficient for the dimensions of a continent in which all standards are many times greater than in old Europe. It was necess-

ary to express oneself in louder, more sharply defined terms, in order to make oneself understood in this "amalgamation of all civilised European nationalities," as Carl Schurz once called his adopted country. This explains why American advertising seems to our European taste to be too loud, too boastful. The art of advertising has everywhere had to pass through the usual infantile diseases. It was often employed for praising bad quality and poor workmanship in an occasionally despicable manner. In the eyes of sensitive persons advertising and humbug appeared as twins.

After a relatively short period, during which the opposition predominated, the European states almost simultaneously discovered the immense importance of this new means of influencing the masses. Merchants, economists and artists were the first, then the political powers hesitatingly followed, and finally a regular advertising science appeared to take up the work of spreading and refining the method of wooing of men and things with all the means offered by modern technical science. As far as the artistic side of wooing in the form of advertising or propaganda is concerned, Europe was soon able to take the lead; especially in Germany, but also in Great Britain and in France, to mention examples, undreamed-of aesthetic effects were achieved. In America, on the other hand, the psychological side of advertising was studied with great intensity, and these studies were immensely successful. A fruitful exchange in the art of advertising has set in between the old and the new world, and today a certain balance is being effected in the kind and the quality of advertising and propaganda on both sides of the ocean. The main differing factors are still the dimensions.

In the same degree as the art of advertising has developed and must still develop beyond national and nautical boundaries, the national characteristics of every nation become apparent in its advertising. Just as the unity of a people and the clear definition of its national will represent a political and cultural propagandistic power for its nationality in the world, it can be said that in all branches, including those of business advertising, the propagandistic work of a nation will be successful in proportion as its own personality as a people is expressed therein. We buy German or North American or Swedish goods, for example, not "world goods." Germany, which is still struggling for its national independence and the development of its own powers in all fields of activity, must also more than other nations consider advertising and propaganda as means of developing its own propagandistic style and carrying it to the ends of the earth with the methods placed at its disposal by the international character of the technical facilities. The economic, political and cultural conditions governing the life of the German people require exact, honest and effective advertising of German wares and people. Advertising of Germany and of everything German in such a manner that the other nations will respect the advertising for its uprightness is an important condition precedent to future prosperity.