



AN HOUR WITH SILAS SPITZER

SILAS SPITZER, the advertising manager of the clothing and haberdashery chain store Weber and Heilbroner, of New York, was the first to replace the usual realistic American advertising by more modern methods, and his success brought about the development of an entirely new movement in American advertising.

It was he who, with surety of instinct, perceived that Hans Schleger-Zéro was the artist whose intentions were most in accordance with his own.

Hans Schleger started by designing the now famous "Fabric Group", a trade-mark composed of three men which in many graphic and photographic variations was used as a fundamental motive by the house of Weber and Heilbroner. By the side of these original graphic designs stand, equally original and arresting, the brilliant texts composed by Silas Spitzer.

Spitzer paid a visit to Berlin last autumn, met Schleger (Zéro) and the editor on a certain occasion and the following conversation took place:

Editor: As far as I am aware, you were the first to carry out modern advertising in the artistic sense of the term in America and apparently you had great success with it. It would be very interesting for me and my readers if you would tell us what induced you to resort to such measures, whereas American advertising is otherwise so very conservative.

Silas Spitzer: Don't talk about modern advertising. Modern means what is modish, that is to say, something which everybody does and everybody tries to imitate. The result is mostly things that are meaningless imitations.

Editor: You are certainly right. Nevertheless one must agree that even in advertising there are movements which to a certain extent carry everything before them and the influence of which is everywhere perceptible.

Silas Spitzer: "It is futile to lay down rigid rules for general advertising practice. Advertising is as fluid as life, changes as life changes, is born, flourishes, dies and is renewed again in other forms. The successful theory of today reflects the tempo of today. When the tempo of life changes, good advertising keeps step.

The best advertising of today is really good commercial journalism. An advertisement must, first of all, be news. To obtain an audience, it

must be lively, spontaneous, dramatic. Today, the advertising sections of American magazines are usually more interesting than the editorial features. One reads copy that is compact and brilliant, in a style as vivid as Joyce and as muscular as Hemingway. Illustrations are no longer confined by the old-fashioned rule which dogmatically stated "Show the product". I have been able to advertise men's clothing by showing an abstract dynamic photograph of the funnels of a steamship, and have helped to sell many thousands of shirts by using wash drawings of peasant folk dances in foreign lands.

It is evident, then, that modern advertising requires more of the genuine creative gift than in the past. In my opinion, the best advertising is usually the work of one mind, or of two or three minds working in harmony.

National advertising can well afford to profit by the spontaneous technique of the best retail campaigns, usually the work of specialists. One of the finest retail advertising campaigns in America is that of R. H. Macy, the great department store. Macy advertising has the viewpoint of youth. It utilizes every source of news. Whether the subject be delicatessen or Chinese antiques, you may be sure that a Macy ad is as interesting as anything you will find in the paper. Other retail campaigns stand out because of the freshness of their viewpoint and the versatility of their conception—Peck & Peck, Spalding, Ovington, Best & Co., are especially noteworthy. The time is coming when the chaste pages of "The Saturday Evening Post", that solid pillar of American respectability, will resemble "The New Yorker" of to-day. If you were a citizen of my country you would appreciate how radical that prediction sounds. But life is changing. And advertising is changing with it."

The story of how Silas Spitzer and Schleger came together is an amusing one. Certain very original drawings by Schleger for a firm of furriers had already appeared. Thereupon Spitzer went to Schleger and said to him: "Can you draw me an elephant for five dollars?" Schleger replied: "No, I can't draw anything for five dollars, not even an elephant." The conversation continued from this point, indeed, one might almost say this was the snowball which launched an avalanche of advertising development.

Translated by E. T. S.