

ADVERTISING.

Walter Dill Scott's Theory of Its Principles on a Psychological Basis.*



VERY business man who advertises, and every business man who has neglected to advertise and wishes to advertise wisely, will be persuaded to become a student of psychology after he has read this very readable and instructive volume. On the second page of the first chapter he may be startled by the announcement that it is estimated that \$600,000,000 is expended annually in the United States for advertising, and that 75 per cent. of this vast amount is expended unprofitably. Not because there was not some skillful advertising in good newspapers and magazines, having the most intelligent and appreciative of readers and having at command also the services of the best writers of advertisements, but largely because much of the advertising, perhaps most of it, was haphazard, untheoretical, unimaginative, irrelevant, and misdirected. Prof. Scott believes, and gives the reasons for his belief, that advertising, to be effective, must be constructed and displayed with reference to the tendencies and habits of the average human mind, and only through an understanding of psychology, the author maintains, can a stable foundation be found for a theory of advertising. Having published most of the chapters of his book in magazine form, and so attracted the attention of many advertisers, he has had the gratification of observing many efforts to apply the psychological theory, with occasional reports of the tests made to prove its efficiency.

Prof. Scott does not assert that there has been much good advertising without formal application of psychological knowledge on the part of the advertisers. Good common sense is a valuable asset for a professional advertisement-maker to possess, and when he adds to a good familiarity with type faces and display a knowledge of the human mind that will enable him to appeal more intimately and surely to its susceptibility to sensations, almost by rule, Prof. Scott's argument will undoubtedly be found to sustain the proposition that even the best advertisers will be benefited by a knowledge that psychology may be studied with profit to their new efforts. The author does not confuse the reader with technical terms, but in telling how to attract attention and hold it, to direct the tendency of the human mind to remember the things that have attracted its attention, to be affected by suggestion, command, and cooperation, illustrates his theory by examples of good and bad advertising, and by representations of desirable and ineffective or injurious association that make clear the meaning of the text. An examination of almost any page in a newspaper or magazine will show to the reader of this book that some application of the theory he propounds has been made to advertising, but that many more advertisers go on spending money in entire ignorance of the hand that science extends to them.

In seeking to attract attention—the first object of the advertiser—it must be borne in mind that the human mind is so constituted that it can only perceive a few things at a time—four words in a line, for instance. Illustrations may help to attract attention, and if there is striking display to hold that attention the reader may go on to study explanatory text. But the illustrations should be self-explanatory and the text relevant to something. An advertisement that is intended to advertise pianos and only describes excellent qualities that could be truthfully attributed to bicycles is irrelevant. By judicious repetition of relevant advertising the eye of the reader is attracted, and the frequent impression made on the eye creates a habit of the mind that leads its possessor to yield, when he wishes to buy, to the inclination established in it by repeated contact with the advertisement. Advertising of the irrelevant sort, which makes imperfect or no lasting impressions on the mind, may be found whenever one takes up a magazine or newspaper. To be effective, therefore, advertising must be easily comprehended. The advertiser who forgets that the reader may not know that he is famous lacks the psychological knowledge that he should possess and loses the opportunity that comes with effective reiteration of a plain fact. First of all, secure attention, then fix it by repetition, and do not let the reader and possible customer get away by failing to hold him by entertaining, instructive, and progressive reiteration.

Although the mind is sometimes considered lawless, it is so constituted that it likes to be commanded. It has been so persistently commanded to by a certain brand of soap that when it wants a cake of soap it is very likely to remember that command and ask for it. But command must be employed judiciously, and it must be supported by the quality of excellence in the goods to be successfully maintained. The "return coupon," with which everybody is acquainted, served a double purpose. It brought prompt answers from persons who were glad to be presented with a convenient way of answering a letter that called for co-operation on the part of the person addressed and gave him a chance to do something. It also gave the advertiser the opportunity to learn how valuable a publication might be as an advertising medium. The invention has proved valuable as a means of hurrying people to action, while it

*THE THEORY OF ADVERTISING. A Simple Exposition of the Principles of Psychology in Their Relation to Successful Advertising. By Walter Dill Scott, Ph. D., Director of the Psychological Laboratory of Northwestern University. Cloth, Pp. xii, 240. Boston: Small, Maynard & Co.

has been more and more employed to allow the advertiser to tell what he has to sell. One observation of the student of advertising by the light of psychology referring to the importance of judicious and appropriate selection of the advertising medium is important to be considered by all advertisers and readers of advertisements:

In choosing the places in which he should place his advertisements the advertiser should not only consider the circulation and the kind of circulation, but he should also consider the tone which each publication would add to his particular advertisement. It is well to have a large number of persons read your advertisement; it is better to have those read it who are interested in it and have the means to purchase the goods advertised; but it is still better to have a large number of the right kind of persons see your advertisement in a publication which adds confidence and recommends it favorably to your prosperous customers. * * * The statement that a man is known by the company he keeps is not often challenged, and yet the statement would have been equally true if asserted of an advertisement. If a man is seen frequently in the company of rascals we think at once that he has become a rascal, but do not suppose that he has reformed his associates. The honorable man loses his reputation by associating with dishonorable persons. An honest firm which advertises in a disreputable sheet and brings its advertisements into association with advertisements of a disreputable character lays itself open to suspicion.

To be a successful writer of advertisements calls not only for the technical knowledge of types and type contrasts already familiar to many of the most successful, but for the possession of imagination, the ability to give precise descriptions of things, a power like that of Washington Irving to describe and convey a sense of the taste and smell of foods, a gift of persuasion or command that will move buyers to the seller, and these qualities can be developed, if present naturally in any degree, by a study of psychology. That study, as applicable to advertising, suggests great possibilities for better advertising.