

The New High Art of "Ad. Writing"

By BENJAMIN DE CASSERES

It has been said recently that literary genius of the country is now divided into two classes—those who write for the "movies" and those who write advertisements. Even the writers who are known as authors of books or contributors to periodicals are likely to be adopting the two aforesaid activities as side lines.

Every man with an electric, epigrammatic, dynamic pen is either corralled by one or the other. And the greater of these is the new-fashioned "ad. writer."

The advertisement is essentially an American product. Paris is the shop of the world, but New York is its showcase. If the American has ideas, he immediately seeks a printer to advertise it to the world. The press agent, the advance agent, the "puffer" and the write-up man are made in America. He is always an individualist. He insists on getting his "goods" before the public in his own way.

Thoreau complained that the heavens and the face of the moon itself would soon be billboards. He knew whereof he spoke.

It looks as though the "renaissance of American literature" would come through the advertising columns of our great newspapers and the pages of our magazines. Today some of the best-written matter that is printed in America introduces a new shoe, a new automobile tire, a sale of clothing, a new alarm clock, a rubber heel or life insurance. The strongest and most powerful pens compete to focus your attention on the advantages of investing your cash in a certain company or to rouse your imagination to the sticking and buying point in the matter of food and socks and sealing wax. It is the survival of the brainiest.

Literature is the art of having something to say and saying it in combustible and vascular words. Is there anything duller than an advertisement in an English or a French paper? The first looks anemic and billous. The latter like the shredded film of the last run of the first movie. But the new school of American advertisement writers play up every conceivable subject under the sun in story-telling style before they inform you that they have a box or two of silk socks for sale or an alarm clock that sounds like a raid.

Poets, essayists and short-story writers have gone into the game—and many have moved from the Mills Hotel into the Ritz.

P. T. Barnum made the white elephant famous; but it was probably the late "Tody" Hamilton who made P. T. immortal. He was one of the very first men who put advertising in the company of the Muses. He was the Victor Hugo of the billboard. He discovered the tremendous power of inflammatory adjectives and adverbs. His circus "ads." drove millions into the Barnum arena by the sheer force of suggestion. He was probably the first American "ad. writer" who bought a dictionary.

He stoned you into the circus with a Colossally Cataclysmic Conjunctionity of Corybantic and Cyclopean Cognomens.

"Tody" was the Homer of the new American literature.

"Tody" begat Elbert Hubbard. Hubbard could write as fascinatingly about a paper of pins as he could about Voltaire or "Bathhouse" John. He began with an anecdote or a story. When he wanted to talk insurance, he started with the Pyramids. When he wanted to force you to buy a suit of clothes, he began with Alice in Wonderland or the cave dwellers of the moon.

As Walt Whitman proved that there was nothing in the universe that was not subject to poetic treatment, Hubbard proved that there was nothing in the business life of the world that could not be treated as literature. Hubbard was the first man who printed signed advertisements. "This advertisement was written by Elbert Hubbard" headed many an advertisement in a newspaper and magazine in his lifetime. Everybody read it. No one has got away with this since—more's the pity! Think of the pulling power in a finely written advertisement in which one could read at the top, "This advertisement was written by Billy Sunday"—or Bryan or Anatole France!

One has but to pick up any news-

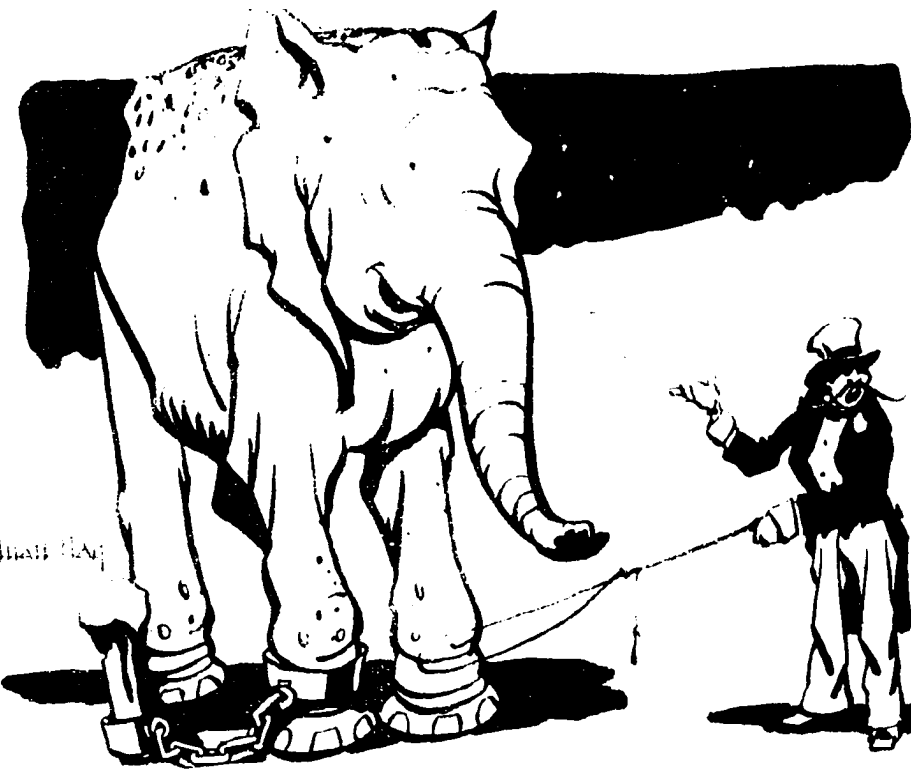
paper or magazine to see what Hamilton and Hubbard inaugurated. They were the fathers of the romantic movement in advertisement writing.

There is more imagination in many of the advertisements that are now appearing in magazines than in most of their fiction. The "new school" of advertisement writer is tremendously highbrow because highbrow writers cannot hope to live by their pens in this country, and few do in any country. So they sell their creative imaginations, their battering ram vocabulary to advertising agencies.

There is a Philip Goodman in New York City, who may or may not be a myth. I am not sure whether it

was he or not that poured into my ear one night his schemes, ideas and epigrams for making the advertising columns of the newspapers and magazines of America a brand-new form of world-renowned literature. When you ask him whether or not he is the author of such-and-such an advertisement remarkable for its classical learning, its style, its resonant slogans or epigrammatic terseness, he smiles the smile of Mona Lisa—and puffs. If he writes as well as he talks, I would believe he was not a myth.

"The language of advertising,"



"P. T. Barnum made the white elephant famous."



"Many have moved from the Mills Hotel into the Ritz."

he said, "must be the language of warmth and color. It must steal softly into our being to cozen and anesthetize our wills. If you are going to go in for the new literature, read Huncker for vocabulary, Shakespeare, Shelley and Swinburne for inspiration, and Mark Twain and Anatole France for simplicity. Then start your rubber tire or Palm Beach suit advertisement. Pal in with the barkeepers of Olympus, who serve nectar in cups of gold, not well water in cups of tin. If the art of wordery was born in you, a few draughts from these gods will not only ecstasize you but intoxicate you. And what every 'ad man' needs is this soaring of spirit and elevation of style. That is the essence of Baudelaire's immortal line,

is at hand. The Shakespeare of shoes and the Poe of pants will soon be born—they will be both Americans.

"Advertising copy is now becoming a living thing. It must fight like a Roman and make love to the public like a Romeo. Italics and capitals are crutches. Brevity is a wing.

"In the America of the future, great poets will not only be born, but they will be paid—by advertising agencies."

So you can see the "renaissance of American literature" is on in full swing, whether Mr. Goodman was "kidding" me or not. I do not know. I have never seen him do anything except play golf.

Closely allied to art is the pictorial advertising poster. There is here,

too, noticeable a revolution all along the line. The old-style "billboard" is going; the artistic, original wall painting is coming—or should.

Carlo de Ponnaro, whose original theatrical posters around the city have attracted a great deal of attention, has some verbal swats at the ugliness of New York because of its hideous billboards.

"The American posters," he says, "are among the worst and most in-artistic in the world. The art societies of Paris lately protested most strenuously to the municipal authorities when they heard that Americans were going to get poster space in Paris to advertise their products. They did not object, they said, to American products, but they insisted on the walls of Paris looking artistic first of all.

"The caveman 25,000 years ago painted better posters in the caves of Europe than our modern American poster murderers, for the caveman artist had taste, imagination, and with exquisite discrimination drew simple lines and flat colors. The average poster artist in America would have been sandbagged if he had dared to deface the ancient cave walls with his monstrosities.

"But there is a light breaking, and the day is not far off when the American business man will pay as much for a good wall or fence poster as he now pays for a poor imitation of a Corot or a Blakelock.

"Artistic street posters are educative—or should be. They have more influence on the imaginations of the people than all the museums (which they never enter) and all the art magazines (which they never read).

"There is no reason why the greatest artists should be ashamed to do street poster work. They do in Paris, where the billboards are the most famous and most artistic in the world.

"The new and modern Maecenases will be canned goods manufacturers and pork packers, who will get the cream of art and literature to devote their energies to advertising their goods, as in the Renaissance the Popes and Princes employed artists and writers to advertise religion and dynasties."

If these things are all true (and I believe they are), America may be the father of the Tenth Muse, Miss Ad-Lane.

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