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MR. YOUNG PRESIDENT OF A. A. A. A.

The tenth annual meeting of the American Association of Advertising Agencies was held at the Mayflower Hotel in Washington, D. C., October 27 - 28.

The outstanding feature of the meeting was the address of President Coolidge on the subject of Advertising at the annual dinner on the evening of the 27th. President Coolidge's address should be read carefully by every one engaged in the advertising business. It is notable as a summary of advertising in its more constructive aspects, but it is made more remarkable by the fact that it was uttered by the President of the United States.

Another important event of the meeting and one which created much favorable comment among those who were in attendance at the sessions was the report by Dr. Starch on the Study of Magazine Circulation which he has been conducting during the past year and a half. This work has been under the direction of the committee on Research of which Mr. Stewart Mims of the New York Office is Chairman. The report was introduced by a statement by Mr. Resor who was responsible for inaugurating the Research Department of the Association during his term of office.

From a J. Walter Thompson Company point of view, a most interesting event was the election of Mr. James Young as President of the Association for the forthcoming year.

There seemed to be a general feeling that the Washington meeting was one of the most interesting and profitable annual meetings that the Association has ever had and there was some agitation in favor of making Washington the regular meeting place for the annual session.

Among the Committee reports was one by Mr. Earle Clark, Chairman of the Committee on Cost Accounting and Standardized Audit; and one by Mr. Paul T. Cherington, Chairman of the Committee on Work with Colleges.



The News Letter presents below another of its series on media written in this instance by the editor of the publication under discussion.

#### THE AMERICAN MERCURY

by H. L. Mencken

The American Mercury is quite devoid of propagandist purpose. It labors under no yearning to "educate" its public, or to put down Babbitry or Bolshevism, or to spread a new gospel of Beauty, or to save the World. Its one aim is to offer civilized entertainment to civilized readers. It assumes that such readers are already educated sufficiently, and perhaps even beyond the bounds of reasonable comfort. It is not alarmed and enraged by Babbitry and Bolshevism -- two almost identical symptoms of the common rage of inferior men to instruct and run their betters --, but amused by them. It harbors no new gospel of Beauty, nor indeed, any new gospel of any sort. It is not concerned about saving the world.

What it believes, primarily, is simply this: that the Uplift, in the main, is vain, hollow and a nuisance, and that the vast majority of uplifters, when they are not palpably insane, are frauds. There are some, of course, who are not; it is always willing to print their names in 10-point type, provided they are sent in by readers who will vouch for them by affidavit, and under suitable bonds. But such names seldom come in, and never with bonds or affidavits. Outside the borders of the Uplift there are many honest men and women, and some of them are also amusing. The American Mercury often prints articles about them, and so rescues them, at least transiently, from their obscurity and disrepute. There are also persons who oscillate beautifully between the Uplift and honest lives. It discusses such persons critically and tries to encourage them, but without much hope.

All the principal authors of the United States write for the magazine -- all, that is, who ever have anything interesting to say. They sell their trade goods to fatter periodicals; in The American Mercury they try to set forth the low-down, as the current term is, upon the world as they see it. But there is never enough such stuff floating about to fill the magazine, for the principal authors of the country like the principal bankers, concentrate most of their time and energy to platitude. So The American Mercury seeks contributions from talented amateurs, and has been very fortunate in unearthing good ones. It has printed articles by business men, lawyers, doctors, diplomats, scientists, pedagogues, politicians and even clergyman. It has printed others by naval and military officers, hoboes, poets, musicians, architects, newspaper reporters, Socialists, housewives, dramatists and the editors of other magazines. It once printed an article by a Mormon, and another by a barber, and yet another by a bishop. It would be delighted to hear from bankers, Congressmen, movie actors, golf players, Channel swimmers and judges, if they were only more charmingly articulate.



The magazine is well printed on light-weight imported paper, and is hand-sewed, so that it opens flat for reading. It is costly to produce and sells at a good round price. It is not aimed at cheap people. But there is nothing highfalutin about it. It doesn't address itself to aesthetes and metaphysicians. It is written in plain (though often acidulous) English, and prints nothing to puzzle and fatigue the mind. When it was started, the editor and publisher believed that a circulation of 20,000 or 25,000 would cover all possible readers. That turned out to be a gross under-estimate. The number is now going beyond 100,000. The subscription list makes very instructive and exhilarating reading. It includes all the most lively and enlightened of Americans - from the wetter university presidents to the editorial writers of the better newspapers, from business men to orchestral conductors, and from the theologians to cheer leaders. The magazine is barred from the Carnegie libraries of many shabby towns, and several efforts have been made by wowers to suppress it altogether. But it goes on steadily, printing better stuff month by month, and increasing in circulation and advertising. It would be a poor medium for advertising cancer cures or for promoting Y. M. C. A. drives, but it sells good books, good automobiles, and all the other things that are bought by civilized people. Very few advertisers of such things, having tried it, have ever dropped out; the returns are always good, and sometimes they are astonishing.

But The American Mercury will never have a million circulation. It is not headed in that direction. Its function is to depict America for the more enlightened sort of Americans -- realistically, with good humor and wholly without cant. It is read wherever a civilized minority survives the assaults of the general herd of yawpers and come-ons. Its aim is to entertain the minority -- and give it some consolation.

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#### ON WRITING FOOD ADVERTISING

A century has passed since Brillat-Savarin, enthusiastically declaring that the number of tastes perceived in foods was infinite, regretted that up to his day no flavor or taste had been rigorously defined and predicted that "those who come after us" would know more about such qualities.

In those hundred years the earth has been combed for new foods. Plant wizards have devoted their lives to creating better foods. Laboratories and factories have established higher standards and improved methods of preparing and packing foods. Domestic science has taught new ways of cooking foods.

But not one new word descriptive of flavor or taste has been added to our language in all the time since Brillat-Savarin wrote. We have increased our scientific knowledge of food -- witness calories, vitamins, and such like terms. But in describing flavor or taste, the most important factor in the advertising and sale of food, we still have only the tools which were available generations ago. Our new fruits and vegetables, our new manufactured products, our new recipes, must be sold in words which were known to Brillat-Savarin as well as to Dr. Wylie.



"The number of tastes perceived in objects is infinite", Brillat-Savarin wrote in 1825, "since every soluble body has a special flavor in some respects differing from all others.

"Flavors receive additional modifications of infinite variety, ranging from the most attractive to the most intolerable, from the strawberry to the colocynth; and all attempts to classify them may be termed failures. Nor is this to be wondered at; for, granted that there are undetermined series of simple flavors which can be modified by combining them in any number and quantity, we should require a new language to express all these results, mountains of folio volumes to define them, and newly devised numerical characters to classify and number them.

"Since, up to the present time, no taste or flavor has, as a sensation, been rigorously defined, men are compelled to keep to a small number of general terms, such as 'sweet', 'sugary', 'sour', 'bitter', and so on; and, on further analysis, these can be classified under the two heads of 'agreeable to the taste', or 'disagreeable'. They suffice, however, to make one's self understood and indicate with tolerable exactness the gustatory properties of any sapid substance about which one is talking. Those who come after us will know more about such qualities, and it seems already certain that chemistry will discover to them the causes of flavors and their ultimate elements".

Now turn to an authoritative book published in 1924, one hundred years after Brillat-Savarin's *Physiologie du Gout*, and see what progress has been made in defining flavor. Henry T. Finck's *Food and Flavor* identifies only four main flavors -- sweet, sour, salt and bitter. Virtually the same as the "small number of general terms" which Brillat-Savarin regarded as inadequate? Finck also recognizes alkaline and metallic tastes, but obviously these have little to do with food. He holds that "with the exception of sweet, sour, salt and bitter, all our countless gastronomic delights come to us through the sense of smell", and that the gratification of the palate depends more on the nose than on the sense of taste.

The general public is not educated to this point of view, and food advertising, representing millions of dollars of investment every year, takes little account of the sense of smell in attempting to create business. Fragrant is occasionally used and so is aroma, most often in connection with coffee, but the most effective food advertising, being wisely adapted to the ideas of the average reader, still deals in terms of taste. Even those two ordinarily potent arguments, economy and convenience, have been found to be subordinate to flavor in building food sales.

"In the last analysis, it is palatability that decides the permanence of any new food", Finck quotes from Harwood, with the comment that Burbank also fully realized the commercial value of flavor. "If palatability be eliminated as a factor, then mankind is prone to consider the food -- no matter what its form or character -- a medicine to be taken because it produces certain necessary results".



With so much dependent on the advertising of flavor, it is all the more wonder that our language has not made more progress in defining and describing tastes. How astonished the garrulous old bon vivant of 1825 would be if he returned to earth for a taste of grapefruit, say, and found no words to describe it other than those he himself used generations ago for the lemon and the orange!

Food advertising has overcome this poverty of language very successfully, judging from the results of the advertising. Masters of food copy today are selling their products largely in terms of the effects they produce, rather than by attempting to describe the flavor. They tell of the pleasure given by the foods, they record the overwhelming approval which the flavor has received from persons of authority, they transfer to the food some subtle suggestion of other pleasant ideas not at all connected with taste. And the ever-active imagination of the reader finishes the impression much more skillfully than could have been done by any direct description.

Robert Louis Stevenson might have been discussing two points of view in advertising when he wrote the following:

"In character studies, the pleasure we take is critical; we watch, we approve, we smile at incongruities... But the characters are still themselves, not us; the more clearly they are depicted, the more widely do they stand away from us, the more imperiously do they thrust us back into our place as a spectator.... It is not character but incident that wooks us out of our reserve. Something happens as we desire it to happen to ourselves; some situation, that we have long dallied with in fancy, is realized in the story with enticing and appropriate details.....Then we plunge into the tale in our own person and bathe in fresh experience".

In conclusion, it is easy to find examples in actual advertising which Stevenson might have had before him as he wrote. Take this "character study", a full page in four colors, from a recent women's magazine:

START THE DAY RIGHT WITH -----OATS

Food that "stands by" through the morning

"Hot oats and milk" is the dietetic urge of the world today. Oats is the richest cereal grown; the best balanced from the standpoint of food experts.....and from yours, the most delicious and attractive. More protein than any other cereal. Rich in carbohydrates. (And so on.)

Then consider this example, which is just as intelligent a catalog of the product's virtues as the foregoing, but is written to make the reader a player in the drama instead of a listener at a lecture:

Women "KITCHEN-TEST" this  
flour in a kitchen just like yours



They test it for every kind of baking --  
the only sure proof a flour will give  
perfect results in all your baking

Fluffy muffins ... light and flaky pastries...  
the most delicate cakes -- now you can make  
them just as well as the best cooks you know.  
With this "kitchen-tested" flour, you can be  
sure they will always come out right. (And so on.)

Joseph Conrad, writing to a friend, said:

"You must treat events only as illustrative of human sensation, as the  
outward sign of inward feelings-- of live feelings -- which alone are  
truly interesting".

If you substitute the word food of the word events in this quotation,  
you have a formula that applies to the most successful food advertising  
in any national magazine today.

by O. Van Wyck  
of the Chicago Office.

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