

Ideals in Food Advertising

Public Health

DR. E. V. MCCOLLUM, School of Hygiene and Public Health, Johns Hopkins University, before the American Public Health Association meeting:

Yet in the main advertising does not yet command sufficient confidence to be a very effective guide for buyers. Many advertisers still tell half-truths, and are decidedly partisan in a deliberate effort to sell the purchaser rather than to help him buy wisely. The mail-order houses have built up a confidence among their patrons by describing honestly the mediocre and superior articles. They try to point out that for certain purposes a low-grade article may be satisfactory. If on seeing the goods it is found to be not what was wanted the buyer is privileged to return it without loss.

Easy to Dress Up Half-Truths

Certain soap, tooth-paste, cereal, face creams and cigarette manufacturers afford examples of national advertising in which extravagant and dishonest claims are the rule. Many of these likewise build their advertising displays upon pseudo science. People have had explained to them in recent years so many things they do not understand, but nevertheless believe because of visual evidence of the marvels of modern science, that it is easy to dress half-truths in the most plausible language. But this is done to the disadvantage of honest advertising, and an enormous amount of waste results from the major half of the advertising world trying to instruct and build up confidence, while a minor half, playing upon credulity, tries to delude and profit by sharp practices which tend to destroy confidence.

The food industry, because of the spectacular advances of the last quarter of a century through scientific research, has been greatly tempted to engage in dishonest advertising. We know a great deal about quality in foods on the basis of the proportions of the indispensable nutrient principles which each contains. Much information has been gained about how far one food supplies in adequate amounts the nutrients which are not abundant in another. In short, we have much useful information about how foods should be selected, and in what combinations and proportions they should be eaten in order to provide all the essential nutrients, afford a proper physical character to facilitate digestion and promote intestinal

hygiene, promote optimal development in the young, preserve their teeth from decay, and in the adult promote health and longevity. There is no significant difference in the views of perhaps twenty-five of the world's most experienced investigators in this field as to what should be said about the place in the diet of any of our more important foods, natural or manufactured, uncooked, cooked or canned.

The type of advertising which we must all deplore is that which invokes the aid of science in support of a product but in which the rules which govern research in science are violated. Half-truths or plausible theories which do not apply are presented, together with a picture which itself tells a story which is misleading.

No Sportsmanship

There is keen competition among food producers and food manufacturers of many kinds, and in many cases the competitors are striving to win without consideration for each other, restrained in their methods only by the necessity for maintaining the outward appearance of respectability. All well-informed people see daily in the magazines, newspapers and on billboards and labels statements which are the counterpart of the glossy duplicity of the confidence man. Not only is there no sportsmanship in much of our food advertising, but its untruths are so thinly disguised that public confidence is in great measure broken down, at least as respects the more intelligent readers of advertisements. The futility of such a course is apparent when one considers that there are thousands of women teaching home economics and domestic science who are sources of authentic information about foods, and about progress in nutrition studies. Dishonest advertising tends to create apprehension in the minds of conscientious mothers, and those who suffer from one or another condition in which some special nutritional regimen is necessary for their recovery or for the maintenance of health. The result is that many persons are confused, and are easily made victims of faddists and unscrupulous promoters.

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Many of the little statues of children found in the ruins of ancient Babylonia and other eastern countries are believed to be votive offerings to a deity in thanksgiving for the birth of a child.

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