

## TRUTH AS A CONSTITUENT OF ADVERTISING\*

By HOWARD HENDERSON

*Vice-President, J. Walter Thompson Company, New York, N. Y.*

AT YOUR meeting of May 19, 1948, William L. Hanaway opened and closed his excellent analysis of advertising claims with this statement by the Supreme Court:

"Advertising as a whole may be completely misleading although every sentence separately considered is literally true."

A vivid example of this fact comes from the autobiography of P. T. Barnum whose fantastic "American Museum" flourished here in New York during the early eighteen sixties. It was replete with human and animal freaks of all kinds, and what nature failed to provide, Barnum made up himself. With such eye-popping wonders, Barnum had a problem to get the old customers out of his museum in order to make room for new customers at 25c a head. So at the last of his exhibits instead of putting up a sign "This Way Out," his sign read "*To the Egress.*" Thinking that this was some new rare bird, the customers piled through the door and found themselves out on the street.

\* Presented at the December 8, 1948, Meeting of the Society of Cosmetic Chemists in New York City.

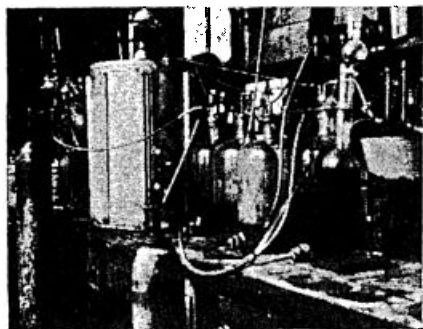
Now if you believe that getting new customers *fast* is the primary aim of business, Barnum's sign "To the Egress" may look like pretty smart advertising. Every word in it is literally true. But what about those old customers who find themselves dumped out into the street? Will they come again and bring their friends? Or will something within them turn sour against Barnum and advertising claims in general? To come right to the point: how important is *truthful* advertising in building the business for which each one of you shares responsibility?

In discussing truth, generalities won't do. We know that truth is something which "conforms to fact or reality." But what do we mean by fact or reality?

Let's consider together this brief outline of one man's search for truth, a man whom I have known intimately for over thirty years. We were roommates for a year as undergraduates and another year in the graduate school. He was perpetually hungry for facts about living things—biology. Every new fact which he thought he could re-

late with others he would record briefly on a card together with its source, and he filed these cards in shoe boxes piled on his desk for ready reference.

Here is a photograph which I took in the laboratory at Boylston Hall, Harvard University in May, 1920, when this man was preparing for his doctor's degree in biological chemistry. You will understand his apparatus far better than I. It was



set up to establish facts on the effect of certain gases on the hemoglobin of the blood. I recall that only a tiny amount of certain gases was enough to distort the equilibrium of the blood constituents sufficiently to cause death of a living creature.

He emphasized the importance of equilibrium in the laws of nature. One evening, he took me to the home of his professor, and the three of us discussed until far into the night the laws of the universe. These laws seemed to govern every fiber of life. We could hope to understand them only in part. But nothing was of more value than those few shreds of truth which we

might learn. Yet no price in money could ever be put upon such truth.

As professional men and women, you clearly understand and share this high regard for truth. Indeed, you participate every day in the search for new facts to add to the storehouse of truth. That is why you are so valuable to your respective companies. But how does this regard for truth apply to the advertising of the companies you represent?

If we try to answer by examples from current advertising, we shall, in effect, be taking re-sections of living skin from our associates to study under the microscope. That might cause pain and leave scars.

Instead, let's get a longer perspective and examine specimens of advertising from the cadaver of American business fifty or sixty years ago. You can then compare these specimens with impressions of current advertising in your own mind and draw your own conclusions. I collected these specimens of old advertising from periodicals in second-hand bookstores in Cincinnati over a period of about ten years. One prize exhibit I found covered with coal dust near the furnace of a dark basement.

This alluring advertisement is from the old *Life* magazine, December 30, 1886. I quote from the text:

"A clear and fresh complexion is insured to every one using *Dr. Campbell's Arsenic Complexion Wafers*.

"The only real beautifier of the complexion skin and form. Face

**A CLEAR AND FRESH COMPLEXION**  
IS ENSURED TO EVERY ONE USING  
**Dr. Campbell's Arsenic Complexion Wafers.**

THE only real beautifier of the complexion skin and form. Face Lotions, Powder, Enamel, so-called "Blood-purifiers," etc., etc., are a delusion and a snare. These Wafers are specially compounded by an experienced physician and chemist, perfectly safe if used as directed, and magical in effect. Freckles, moth, black-heads, pimples, vulgar redness, rough, yellow or "muddy" skins, and other facial disfigurements, are permanently removed, and a deliciously clear complexion and "rounding up" of angular forms insured.

**"I OWE MY COMPLEXION TO"**

**What "Society" Says of Them.**

New York, N.Y.  
Nov. 17, 1886.

In a letter which I have just received from a lady who writes "I have been using Dr. Campbell's Arsenic Complexion Wafers for only a few days, and the skin of my face is so clear and fresh, and I feel so well, both of which you speak for themselves. I have, through their use, been cured of a chronic skin disease, which for years had bothered the earnest endeavorers of the most eminent physicians. I voluntarily, and with full permission to refer to my case, give you my best wishes, and energy of the Arsenic Wafers, to me at once. How the number of which you sell full minutes can be seen from the samples."



**What "Society" Says of Them.**

Barnstable, St. Paul, Mass., July 1886.

I have used the six boxes of Dr. Campbell's Arsenic Complexion Wafers some time since. I am very much pleased with them, and realize a great change for the better. Please send me six more boxes as soon as you can, and oblige."

Three thousand letters certifying to benefits received, and that Dr. Campbell's Arsenic Complexion Wafers accomplished all that it is claimed for them can be seen at office.

**Dr. Campbell's Arsenic Complexion Wafers.**

For the removal of the above imperfections the Wafers were specially and exclusively intended. But marvelous to relate, hundreds of persons using them have found them to be also an absolute specific in Dyspepsia, Habitual Constipation, Malaria, Neuritis, Rheumatism, Loss of Appetite, Nervousness, Failing Sight, Impaired Digestion, Lack of Luster Eyes, Low Spirits, Want of Vitality, Mal-Assimilation of Food, Headache, Hay Fever, etc., etc. thereby conclusively demonstrating the extraordinary virtues of arsenic as a remedial agent when judiciously and appropriately administered. Over 1,000 testimonials to its efficacy and perfect safety at office. **FREE CONSULTATION DAILY TO 6 P.M.**

**50c and \$1.00 per box. Sent by Mail to Any Address. Samples, 25c. Silver.**  
PREPARED ONLY BY  
**JAS. P. CAMPBELL, M.D., 146 W. 16th St., N. Y.**  
**NONE OTHERS ARE RELIABLE OR SAFE. FOR SALE BY LEADING DRUGGISTS.**

PHYS. OF FERRIS, ROBERTS & ALLEN, 21-23 WEST TWENTY-FIFTH STREET, NEW YORK.

**LIFE** December 30, 1886

Lotions, Powder, Enamel, so-called 'Blood purifiers' etc. etc., are a delusion and a snare. These wafers are specially compounded by an experienced physician and chemist, perfectly safe if used as directed, and magical in effect. *Freckles, moth, blackheads, pimples, vulgar redness, rough, yellow or 'muddy' skins* and other facial disfigurements are permanently removed, and a deliciously *clear complexion* and 'rounding up' of angular forms insured."

Then, after eloquent testimonials including "three thousand letters certifying to benefits received" comes this "kicker," a striking example of the blending of cosmetic with medical claims characteristic of the period:

"For the removal of the above imperfections, the Wafers were specially and exclusively intended, but, marvelous to relate, hundreds of persons so using them have most unexpectedly found them to be an absolute *specific* in *Dyspepsia, Habitual Constipation, Malaria, Neuralgia, Rheumatism, Loss of Appetite, Nervousness, Failing Sight, Impaired Digestion, Lack Lustre Eyes, Low Spirits, Want of Vitality, Mal-Assimilation of Food, Headache, Hay Fever, etc. etc.*, thereby conclusively demonstrating the extraordinary virtues of *arsenic* as a remedial agent when *understandingly* and *appropriately* administered. *None others are reliable or safe. For sale by leading druggists.*"

In *Godey's Lady's Book* of January, 1886, appears this touching picture and copy:

"*Barry's Tricopherous* For the Hair. The Oldest and Best in the World. Will be famous as long as fine hair is an object of desire to man

and woman. Apply it daily, and a splendid head of Hair will be the certain and permanent result."

ESTABLISHED 1801.

## BARRY'S TRICOPHEROUS



### FOR THE HAIR.

The Oldest and the Best in the World.

Will be famous as long as fine Hair is an object of desire to man and woman. Apply it daily, and a splendid head of Hair will be the certain and permanent result.

(From *Godey's Lady's Book*, January, 1886.)

Well? Here I stand—and you ask me—is that advertisement true or false?

On this back cover of *Cosmopolitan* for July, 1896, is our old friend *Ivory Soap*, "99"/<sub>100</sub>% pure. 'A cold bath is a good tonic and nerve bracer.' If *Ivory Soap* is used, it is a beautifier as well."

A conservative claim then, but immediately below it appears this unsavory advertisement:

"The Greatest Medical Discovery of the Age. *Kennedy's Medical*

# IVORY SOAP

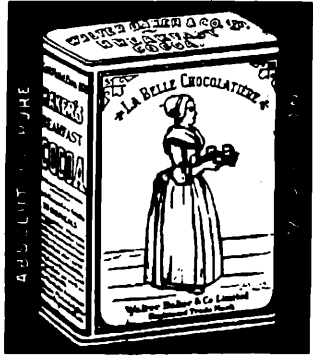
99<sup>11</sup>/<sub>100</sub> PURE

"A cold bath is a good tonic and nerve bracer."

If Ivory Soap is used, it is a beautifier as well.

THE PROCTER & GAMBLE CO., CINCINNATI.

**WALTER BAKER & CO., LIMITED.**  
Established Dorchester, Mass., 1780.  
**Breakfast Cocoa**



Always ask for Walter Baker & Co.'s  
**Breakfast Cocoa**  
Made at  
**DORCHESTER, MASS.**  
It bears their Trade Mark  
"La Belle Chocolatiere" on every can.  
**Beware of Imitations.**

**The Greatest Medical Discovery of the Age.**  
**KENNEDY'S MEDICAL DISCOVERY.**

**DONALD KENNEDY, of ROXBURY, MASS.,**  
Has discovered in one of our common pasture weeds a remedy that cures every kind of Humor, from the worst Scrofula down to a common Pimple.  
He has tried it in over eleven hundred cases, and never failed except in two cases (both thunder humor). He has now in his possession over two hundred certificates of its value, all within twenty miles of Boston. Send postal card for book.  
A benefit is always experienced from the first bottle, and a perfect cure is warranted when the right quantity is taken.  
When the lungs are affected it causes shooting pains, like needles passing through them; the same with the Liver or Bowels. This is caused by the ducts being stopped, and always disappears in a week after taking it. Read the label.  
If the stomach is foul or bilious it will cause squeamish feelings at first.  
No change of diet ever necessary. Eat the best you can get, and enough of it. Dose, one tablespoonful in water at bedtime. Sold by all Druggists.

**Wheel Economy**  
**Save Half**

The maker of any \$100 wheel could sell it direct to the rider and make a good profit at \$50. His \$100 price provides for commissions and profits to dealers and agents.  
"THE WINSLOW" is as good a wheel as money will buy. We do not sell to dealers—we have no agents. There is only one profit on it. It is a \$100 wheel for \$49.85. Delivered at your door. Your money back if you want it. Send for our free book, "Wheel Economy."  
**BOSTON WHEEL WORKS,**  
209 Devonshire Street, Boston, Mass.

**GET RICH QUICKLY A FORTUNE IN AN HOUR** can be made by inventing something new. Send for list of 100 INVENTIONS WANTED and patent book free. Patents procured through us sold without charge. Solicitors of United States and Foreign Patents, Trade Marks, Designs, and Copyrights. **645 BROADWAY, NEW YORK.** Branch Houses in all Countries.

(From Cosmopolitan, July, 1896.)

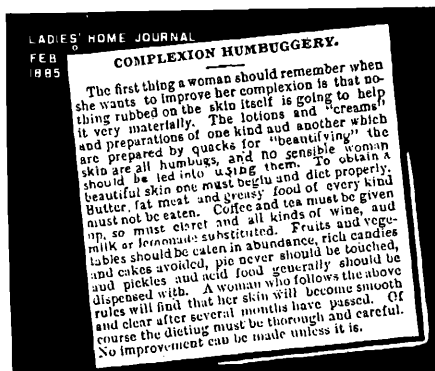
*Discovery.* Donald Kennedy of Roxbury, Mass., has discovered in one of our common pasture weeds a remedy that cures every kind of Humor, from the worst Scrofula down to a common Pimple." etc. etc.

The next six slides from the *Ladies' Home Journal*, 1885-1890, reveal conflicts between advertising claims and editorial opinion.

*Editorial: Ladies' Home Journal, February, 1885:*

### COMPLEXION HUMBUGGERY

"The first thing a woman should remember when she wants to improve her complexion is that nothing rubbed on the skin itself is going



to help it very materially. The lotions and 'creams' and preparations of one kind and another which are prepared by quacks for 'beautifying' the skin are all humbugs, and no sensible woman should be led into buying them. To obtain a beautiful skin one must begin and diet properly. Butter, fat meat and greasy food of every kind must not be eaten. Coffee and tea must be given up."

Details of the diet follow.

*Editorial: Ladies' Home Journal, June, 1885:*

### READ ADVERTISEMENTS

"It will pay as well as interest you to look over the various announcements in our advertising columns. You are invited to send for anything advertised herein, with the utmost

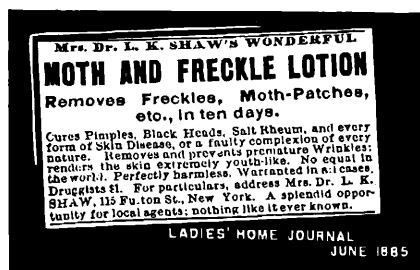
### JUNE 1885 THE LADIES' HOME JOURNAL

READ ADVERTISEMENTS.	
AL.	It will pay, as well as interest you, to look over the various announcements in our advertising columns. You are invited to send for anything advertised herein, with the utmost confidence that you will be squarely dealt with, as the Ladies' Home Journal will not admit swindling or even doubtful advertisements under any consideration.
St.	
NY.	<b>GOOD ADVICE TO HUSBANDS.</b> An exchange gives the following: Do not wait till the cloud is gathering darkly over your financial sky before you endow your wife with a share of your worldly goods, for then she can scarce feel it is her own, when her husband's creditors are clamoring for pay. Make your appropriation in fair weather, when the property is honestly yours to give. Women want a sympathetic word, and if she gets this from a genial husband, she is usually safe from injudicious counsel and unwise expenditure. Many a wretched pair becomes wretched because their little troubles have not
one	played a duet as a want to do, is to get now as piece, (not difficult) and quit for the piano, and if suggest something to me, it a favor on one whose life is who needs all the help possible. I have been quit painting, in water colors, work to oil. I wish I could work in the water color color I could know what is trying circumstances. But I have a greater love for every suggestion from you received.
Can	some of the ladies I make use of little bits of and Germantown moulds left, that I should love to see, if I only knew how.
With	many thanks for lessons I have learned from the hope that it may be household in the land as it

confidence that you will be squarely dealt with, as *The Ladies' Home Journal* will not admit swindling or even doubtful advertisements under any consideration."

*Advertisement: Same issue:*

"Mrs. Dr. L. K. Shaw's Wonderful MOTH AND FRECKLE LOTION "Removes Freckles, Moth Patches, etc., in ten days. "Cures Pimples, Black Heads, Salt Rheum, and every form of skin



disease or a faulty complexion of every nature. Removes and prevents premature Wrinkles; renders

the skin extremely youth like. No equal in the world. Perfectly harmless. Warranted in all cases. Druggists \$1."

*Editorial: Ladies' Home Journal, July 1890:*

#### ARE OUR ADVERTISEMENTS SAFE?

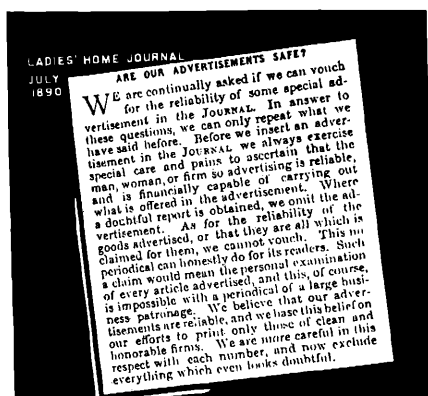
"We are continually asked if we can vouch for the reliability of some special advertisement in the Journal. In answer to these questions, we can only repeat what we have said before. Before we insert an advertisement in the Journal we always exercise special care and pains to ascertain that the man, woman or firm so advertising is reliable, and is financially capable of carrying out

are reliable, and we base this belief on our efforts to print only those of clean and honorable firms. We are more careful in this respect with each number, and now exclude everything which even looks doubtful."

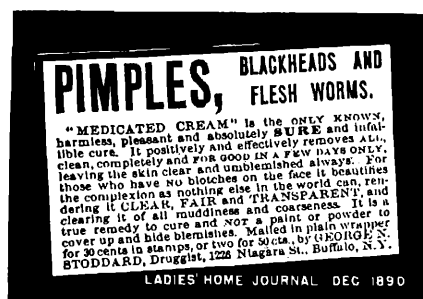
*Advertisement: Ladies' Home Journal, December, 1890, Inside Back Cover:*

#### PIMPLES, BLACKHEADS AND FLESH WORMS

"'Medicated Cream' is the only known harmless, pleasant and absolutely sure and infallible cure. It positively and effectively removes ALL, clean, completely and FOR GOOD IN A FEW DAYS ONLY, leaving the skin clear and unblem-



what is offered in the advertisement. Where a doubtful report is obtained we omit the advertisement. As for the reliability of the goods advertised, or that they are all that is claimed for them, we cannot vouch. Such a claim would mean the personal examination of every article advertised, and this, of course, is impossible with a periodical of a large business patronage. We believe that our advertisements are reliable, and we base this belief on our efforts to print only those of clean and honorable firms. We are more careful in this respect with each number, and now exclude everything which even looks doubtful.



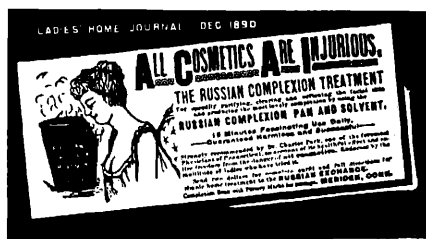
ished always. For those who have no blotches on the face, it beautifies the complexion as nothing else in the world can, rendering it CLEAR, FAIR and TRANSPARENT, and clearing it of all muddiness and coarseness. It is a true remedy to cure and NOT a paint or powder to cover up and hide blemishes. Mailed in a plain wrapper for 30 cents in stamps, or two for 50 cents., by GEORGE N. STODDARD, Druggist, 1226 Niagara St., Buffalo, N. Y."

*Advertisement: Same issue, same page (inside back cover):*

### ALL COSMETICS ARE INJURIOUS

"THE RUSSIAN COMPLEXION TREATMENT For speedily purifying, clearing and softening the facial skin and producing the most lovely complexion by using the RUSSIAN COMPLEXION PAN AND SOLVENT.

"15 minutes fascinating use daily. Guaranteed harmless and successful. Strongly recommended by



Dr. Charles Park, one of the foremost physicians of Connecticut, on account of its healthful effect and entire freedom from the danger of all cosmetics. Endorsed by the multitude of Ladies who have tried it."

From this slugging match in print, you can readily see that a referee was needed. In 1892 the *Ladies' Home Journal* itself refused to accept any more advertisements of patent medicines and waged an editorial fight against them. Later, a vigorous campaign was fought by *Good Housekeeping* against adulterated foods and medicines through the leadership of Dr. Harvey W. Wiley. As the Joint Committee of the Association of National Advertisers and the American Association of Advertising Agencies said recently, "The American system recognized in the early 1900's that a free market had to be policed if it

were to be kept free... Therefore we believed that our government should... referee the game but not play in it."

Our exhibits indicate that establishing an umpire to enforce the rules has made truth a much more important constituent of cosmetic advertising than it was in the gay nineties. And business has been good. Since 1914, the first year for which industry figures are available, the cosmetic business has grown from about \$40 million to \$680 million, or 17 times. In the same period, national advertising has increased 13 times. Since these sales represent many millions of *free choice* votes in dimes, quarters, and dollars, could it be that the public favors better cosmetic products and a larger proportion of truth in advertising? Might they not even prefer to take their truth straight?

We are in this business of making and selling cosmetic products today—as Mr. Webster says, "for imparting or improving beauty, particularly the beauty of the complexion." It is a business increasingly recognized as essential to our society. During World War II it was considered a builder of morale. Certain cosmetic ingredients were, of course, given priority for combat use, but most cosmetics remained available. G. I.'s took lipsticks in their pockets to cosmetic-starved women of Europe. Distinguished hospitals now include the use of cosmetics as part of their therapy for restoring women to mental health. In our free society



we have given the beauty of women a high place. In the advertising of this beauty, truth should come first.

Truth in advertising begins with the product itself. Each one of you goes all out to be sure you make the best possible cold cream, lipstick, make-up foundation, face powder. You constantly seek ways to improve your products. You call in dermatological counsel, expert scientific laboratories to see how to make a good product better, how to help your customers use it more effectively. Through the hard way of testing and self-criticism you approach perfection, yet never quite reach it.

You have guiding rules and principles of your profession as we do in our business to restrain those who try to cheat. The Food and Drug Administration and the Federal Trade Commission were created to protect the public against such violators. But why need you be concerned? You know that their test of truth is just the same as yours, "Does this product back up its claims?" You do not try to put something over on the truth. Instead, you are driven by an urge from within to *discover new truth*. You are guided by the laws of the universe, and inspired with a high regard for the integrity of your profession as a scientist.

While we lean upon you for this *material* truth about the product, we together must also interpret that product to the woman in terms of what it will do for her. "Imparting or improving beauty, particularly

the beauty of the complexion" which is Webster's idea of the cosmetic business, involves a degree of *emotional* truth which seems to transcend the slide rule or the precise legal phrase.

I need hardly remind the men in this room that the beauty of women's faces in 1947 transformed 1,992,000 males in this country from easy-going bachelors to hustling husbands. Although to each one of these 1,992,000 men the face of his bride was in truth beautiful, that same woman's face when observed by certain other men would not be beautiful to them. Furthermore, in 1947, the faces of 471,000 women, which to an equal number of individual men had once seemed beautiful enough to precipitate a wedding, now became sufficiently unappetizing to these same men as to cause divorce. And of course the faces of these men underwent corresponding changes in the eyes of their erstwhile wives, although the objective photographs of each would fail to reveal sufficient changes to justify divorce in a court of law.

Now if you want to apply these disquieting contradictions to advertising copy, take a love letter. A love letter is perhaps the best piece of selling copy the average man ever writes. It has an emotional quality which induces action, gets results. It is written to one woman by a man who is intensely interested in that woman. Test it by any standard of good copy writing and you will find that it measures up surprisingly well. It is a *vividly accurate index of*

*a state of mind*, as any member of the legal profession proves when it becomes his duty to establish the cash value of a love letter in a court of law.

Over one hundred and fifty years ago a young Scot named Robert Burns wrote this to his sweetheart:

“As fair art thou, my bonnie lass,  
So deep in luv am I:  
And I will luv thee still, my dear,  
Till a’ the seas gang dry:  
“Till a’ the seas gang dry, my dear,  
And the rocks melt wi’ the sun;  
I will luv thee still, my dear,  
While the sands o’ life shall run.”

These words have been treasured truth for over a hundred and fifty years. Today from the gold-edged leaves of leather-bound books in many countries of the world and in many languages they still speak the truth that women thrill to hear and strong men would say if they only could.

You can see now why material truth in cosmetic advertising is not enough. For the “imparting or improving of beauty” woman must

also be reached by that deeper *emotional* truth which transcends any arbitrary human code, and inspires woman to realize her highest self through her beauty which others see first.

*To sum up*: What does truth as an ingredient of advertising mean to each one of us personally?

Simply this: As *both* lenses of binoculars give us greater depth and clarity, so do we perceive truth in clearer perspective through both its *material* and *emotional* aspects. The more clearly we see truth, the less need we have for outside regulations in our advertising copy, the greater the impact of our advertising on the minds of the consumer, the less we need be concerned about the claims of our competitors. With such *inner* vision our own individual conscience points the way as a compass needle to the North Star. We are re-charged with new creative power through the fresh promise of this ancient wisdom:

“You shall know the truth,  
and the truth shall make you free.”