

ADVERTISING DRAWS IRE OF MANY PHILOSOPHERS

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Have you ever noticed how one thing leads to another and suddenly a series of events become a single thought or focus? This is the gist of my latest journey through one such realm. A group of us were tossing around some of our more illuminating life experiences on a typical male bonding weekend in hunting camp when the seed was planted.

My companions were movers and shakers far removed from the humble path I have chosen to walk. They were much more astute and attuned to the business world than your obedient servant who hung on every word was. It was the beginning of a particularly successful business — and the reasons for its success — that settled in my mind.

The story has it that a group of executives in a repartee similar to the discussion we were engaged in were expounding on how incredibly gullible the general public can be. It caused one of them to remark, "You could even sell them water."

The thought remained implanted in the recesses of my mind until a suggestion for a column brought it back into focus. Why not do an article on the many absurd, nearly useless articles offered up in many of the far too numerous catalogs cluttering our mailboxes each day. This in turn reminded me of the statements attributed to some famous curmudgeons on the subject of advertising and its relation to the intelligence of the general public.

Stephen Leacock leads off the procession with his observation: Advertising may be described as the science of arresting human intelligence long enough to get money from it. Fred Allen claimed: Advertising is 85 percent confusion and 15 percent commission.

George Orwell's perception was one of: Advertising is the rattling of a stick inside a swill bucket.

Sinclair Lewis noted: Advertising is a valuable economic factor because it is the cheapest way of selling goods, particularly if the goods are worthless.

George Santayana remarked: Advertising is the modern substitute for argument; its function is to make the worse appear better.

H.G. Wells saw it this way: Advertising is legalized lying.

Legendary showman P.T. Barnum became famous for his impression of the public as suckers with one born every minute. A modern day curmudgeon acquaintance of mine embellished it with the addition of, "With their mouths wide open."

Karl Kraus touched on the subject somewhat with his thoughts on psychoanalysis: They pick our dreams as though they were our pockets.

H.L. Menckler gets my vote as the all time reigning master of satire and his words on the subject of the American public is just one example of several he is famous for: No one ever went broke underestimating the intelligence of the American public.

Words of wisdom and a truism made more credible by each and every one of us. It would be redundant to pursue in detail the various items most of us deem dispensable that are offered for sale today. We are all aware of many of them. I am reminded as I finish this missive of how factual its first sentence is: I have become aware of a frightening analogy between its subject and politics.