

BUSINESS SELLING ITSELF

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“THE old idea that business is getting the better of your neighbour is not only bad business, but nonsense. Business is not getting the better of, but doing the best for, your neighbour and yourself. If business is not mutually profitable, it is mutually destructive. My neighbour’s prosperity helps mine, and mine his.” So declared the late Lord Leverhulme, than whom Great Britain produced no greater business man during the past generation.

There are not wanting leaders in America who proclaim the same doctrine—chief among them *Nation’s Business*, the official publication of the Chamber of Commerce of the United States. Editorially some time since it discussed how the French have a delightful way of saying that to know all is to forgive all, and how from the corporation bairer no such enlightened understanding is to be expected. Where the heart resists, the head may still offer an opportune opening to good counsel by reason.

It is through the eye and the ear that the progressive corporation now seeks to make its case in the public mind. Not because its publicity policy is new, but because of the unusual means of information, the example set by the *Commonwealth Edison Company* of Chicago provides a timely text. By broadcasting the meetings of its directors, it has taken the public into a larger confidence. For this company it is literally true that even the walls have ears. The microphones, *Nation’s Business* declares, “in the board room put every one of the million bondholders, stockholders, and customers on the inside of affairs.” By putting its proceedings on the air for all who might wish to listen, this hundred-million-dollar corporation has added a new dimension to our current ideas of public relations.

That skilful advertising man of Boston, George W. Coleman, expressed his belief that the day had come for the first time in history when a man can take up business “in the same spirit which has prompted men to go into the Christian ministry”. In an address to a group of theological students, Coleman said:—

Heretofore a man who found himself with a business aptitude and an imperative desire to serve his day and generation would go into business with the idea of using it as a stepping-stone to

Christian service. He would think of his business as a means of acquiring wealth, experience and reputation, which some day he would use directly in the affairs of the Kingdom. Many a noble Christian business man has served magnificently in that way, but I think the time has now come when a young man can follow business as a profession with the purpose of making the business itself serve the Kingdom of God in a most direct and effective manner, entirely aside from the uses to which he might put his profits in philanthropies outside of his business.

John D. Rockefeller, Jr., is at the head of one of the biggest groups of interests in the world, those centring around the *Standard Oil*, the career of which in all its ramifications has been vividly and incisively told by Ida Tarbell and the late Henry Demarest Lloyd. As a conservative friend of mine said, "it is not a nice story"—which was his way of expressing condemnation. Young Mr. Rockefeller, as he is still known, although he is now past sixty years of age, wrote to Robert W. Stewart whose activities in the *Indiana Standard Oil* had attracted first the attention and then the active prosecution of the U. S. Senate, that he owed it to himself and to his associates in the management of the company, to the stockholders and to the public to help to bring these transactions to the fullest light that could be thrown upon them. No desire, however, praiseworthy, to protect those who may have been guilty of wrongdoing, he declared, justified the withholding of any slightest fact that would help to clear up the situation. "I urge you with all the influence", he said, "that I possess not to wait for an invitation from the Senate committee which has been appointed to look into this matter, much less a subpoena to appear before it, but to wire the Senator at once, offering to put yourself at the disposal of the committee to tell all you know about this matter".

Advertising has almost reached the dignity of a science. Some of the recent books dealing with it have the charm and force of some of the best non-fiction sellers. Moreover, some of the magazine articles have an allurements as strong and fascinating as anything that Christopher Morley ever wrote. Take this excerpt from Gerald Carson's article in *Scribner's*:

"How can an intelligent man spend his life thinking about things that come in tin cans and paper cartoons"? is a question often posed by those who seem to breathe easily in the realm of pure ideas. The reason, as I have been trying to indicate, is that the little jiggers in the tubes and cans and cartons of beans and shaving cream and all—are symbols, shadows of ideas which lie at the base of all human activity. This is Platonic, but true. And, once the things we use in living are grasped imaginatively, what could be a happier business than to spend one's day inviting

thoughts about paints and wall board, about motor cars or the feel of finely balanced tools, about tinned foods which made women happier and creams which make them prettier? If you respond to the emotional content of this paragraph, you know what advertising means to the copywriter. Unobtrusively, he stands in the wings and lets the show go on. And if it is good, he is content, because he has gained the highest reward which work can give—the satisfaction which accrues from the confident and effective exercise of one's natural faculties.

How often have we laymen succumbed to the attractiveness of such writings, and bought things we did not want, or imagined ourselves the victims of ailments we did not have!

This sort of writing has been applied directly and indirectly to business as a whole, as well as to specific lines. As that prince of house publication editors, Thomas Dreier, declared, there is no reason why a story cannot be told interestingly. Every product has something about it that will interest people when the story is told properly. We might think that a product like gelatine would have little in it to appeal. With the help of a general manager we have managed, he tells us, "to interest all kinds of people in gelatine and in the particular brand we were advertising. Let us send you samples showing how this product is advertised to both ice cream and candy manufacturers. Research at Mellon Institute and elsewhere gave us the facts. To present those facts properly was our special task. Let us help you to tell your story to your public."

Business is certainly selling itself!

What business is doing to improve the conditions under which it is conducted, is being told far and wide and with an astounding skill. There, for instance, was recently published a book on *Psychology for Executives* told by a Yale professor, formerly on the executive staff of the *Dennison Manufacturing Company*. Businessmen are seeking to settle their difficulties out of court through boards of arbitration, and then the fact is broadcast.

Haley Fiske, in his lifetime the president of America's biggest insurance company, in a remarkable address on "The New Responsibilities of Business" told in his convincing way of the forward steps taken by business men in their relations to each other, to the public and to their employees. In concluding his thrilling story, he declared,

Here is a new situation—a new Business Era. Both sides are calling for mutual understanding, and both are expressing the duty of public service. I have tried to point out by actual examples the "New Responsibilities of Business" They are, to sum up, to Elevate our Ideals. The true ideal of the business

man is to be of service to his country, to his associates in occupation, to the public, to those dependent upon him. Righteousness exalts Business. High ideals elevate the individual. There is nothing in the world that appeals to a man's conscience like Service. Ambition fades. The glory of wealth fades. Extent of power fades. What does remain here and throughout eternity is that every man try his best in serving God to serve well, his fellow men.

I know those to have been his ideals, and that he strove valourously to reach them, and I believe that Owen D. Young meant just what he said when he asserted that "during the last thirty years the morals and standards of business have advanced." Mr. Young strongly contends that if big business is to be profitable business, it must take account of the moral law. "Do you say", he asked, "that there is no question of right or wrong, in the moral sense, in the fixing of a bank rate—that it is only a financial matter?" "I know of no act", he replied, "which bristles with more moral problems."

Mr. Young also finds improvement in "big business". A few years ago the owners of a business were held responsible for it: to-day when shares of stock may be held by thousands of people "we have completely divorced ownership from responsibility". Responsibility is now vested, according to Mr. Young, in managers, chairmen and presidents, and vast executive organizations. They alone know the business. They must be held responsible not only for its material welfare, but for its moral conduct.

On the other hand, we have the indictments of big business by Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson and Franklin D. Roosevelt. The late Alton B. Parker called on his associates in the U. S. Chamber of Commerce to cast out the defilers of the institution of business. The United States Senate fairly shrieks with charges of corruption, and grantees of government privileges have been compelled to return them. The power interests are charged with suborning the teaching forces of the country. Vast mergers throw out of employment old and valued retainers, making no provisions for old age or new places, all on the principle of "business is business". The big dividends made in mergers and through government grants have not been returned. So notwithstanding that business is seeking to find itself, one feels impelled to ask "Is business really better?" Is it really guided by the ideals so eloquently set forth by men like Haley Fiske and Owen D. Young? Or is it only a seeming?

Let us fervently and honestly indulge the hope that business leaders are seeing a great light and moving steadily toward it.