

Thought for the Day - Advertising

I love looking at old ads - especially the medical ones. When they first started appearing, they used the scattergun approach: they cured *everything*. "Wilkinson's Liniment - guaranteed against all cancers, the common cold and verrucas", or "Brown's Elixir - efficacious for baldness, whooping cough and smallpox".

For a mere ninepence, you could cure anything from pimples to appendicitis... and you could often do it all with *just one* medicinal compound. It's surprising the Victorians ever died out with all these wonder drugs. If only the one offering eternal youth had been more effective....

Then we're into the age of the testimonial ads: *J.S. of Preston* says, "my prosthetic leg from *Jake's* is better than the original - now I'm a tap-dancing champion". *Mrs E Grimes* writes, "In just three days all my unsightly hair had gone, thanks to your product". But what is "unsightly hair" anyway? Is it *especially* ugly - or is it just ordinary hair that's growing in an inconvenient place? And how do we know that Mrs. Grimes wasn't just *generally* unsightly? The hair might have been the least of her problems. As an aside, that's the great thing about being an aging male: I might start losing the hair off my head, but I'll be amply compensated by growth in other areas. Some of us get so much coming out of our ears, we could use it for a comb-over.

Back to ads. The testimonials were superseded by the 'before and afters', and those golden words, "I was a seven stone weakling". The 'before' picture featured an emaciated little chap - Mr Puniverse, as he came to be known. Then there's the 'after' picture - in which he's become grotesquely muscle-bound. Yes, "I was a seven stone weakling.... but now I'm hideously deformed."

There was also the one which asked "Do you want to lose ten pounds of ugly fat?" (And *no*, the ad didn't go on to say "Then cut your head off!", like in the old joke). This one had a 'before and after' of a woman - if it *was* the same woman. She used the dietary product, and guess what? She must have been forty pounds lighter, *and* ten years younger. Common sense should tell people that a woman won't just happen to have a 'before' photo of her semi-clad body, with her stomach ballooning over her pants, but there you are: most advertising relies on the public not exercising common-sense.

The sixties saw sex-appeal make its advertising debut on T.V. One of the first ads of this type was for St. Bruno pipe tobacco. It featured a guy who wore a nautical cap at a jaunty angle... and he puffed a pipe as he swaggered around. This proved irresistible to girls - the more he puffed, the more they panted after him. It was, perhaps, a little short on social realism: It *could* have shown him taking a puff, and his false teeth flying out as he coughed uncontrollably... with the girls walking off in disgust. *I'd* have bought it - I was 9 at the time, and being pestered by girls. Just a shame they stopped pestering by the time *I* was interested.

Perhaps the most crass and inept advertising campaign ever, has also been the longest one. When Christ told his followers that *they* were 'the light of the world' he was giving Christians the job of handling his P.R....his advertising. We've been making a pig's ear of it ever since, despite having the most sensational 'product' available. The joy of really living for Christ may be inexpressible, but we're still called to somehow get that across. If you don't know that joy yourself, please don't wait for us to get our campaign up to speed before checking it out (you could be waiting a long time). Act now to avoid disappointment!