OUR MASTER'S VOICE

ADVERTISING

BY JAMES RORTY

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CHAPTER 19

EVOLUTION OF THE AMERICAN HERO

THE emergence of organized and incorporated salesmanship as the characteristic phenomenon of the American society, the transmigration of the soul of the Fourth Estate into the material body of the advertising business—these developments can be viewed as logical sequences in the evolution of industrial capitalism; they can also be studied as the end products of a social philosophy. In this chapter we shall attempt to outline the ideological evolution as it appears in the life and works of significant American personalities. Benjamin Franklin, Jay Cooke, P. T. Barnum, Henry Ward Beecher, Elbert Hubbard, Bruce Barton: what these men thought and did and said was doubtless determined largely by the economic environment in which they rose to power and influence. But their attitudes, acts and utterances served to rationalize and thereby to promote the material evolution, in the study of which the economist specializes. What we look for, in the evidence of these lives, is the religion of salesmanship which became more and more, after the turn of the century, the religion of advertising. What we find is a kind of sequence of crowd heroes, each modeling himself more or less on the ones preceding. They are middle-class heroes, all of them, and the crown and glory of the towering structure of rationalization which they erected is the identification of the Christ mission with the mission of the middle-class salesman and advertising man, which was accomplished by Mr. Barton in

The Man Nobody Knows.

Even today the masthead of the *Saturday Evening Post* bears the proud statement "Founded by Benjamin Franklin." The statement is true in spirit if not in fact. The *Saturday Evening Post* is the most influential advertising medium in America—in the world for that matter. And the social and political philosophy of its publisher derives clearly from the sly wisdom of that ineffable parvenu, that Yankee all-right-nick of genius who signed himself "Poor Richard." Franklin serves as a point of departure because he was a business-minded pragmatist. He was not a Babbitt and it is impossible to conceive of Franklin, a man of genius, playing the rôle of a Hubbard or a Barton a century later. But on the other hand it seems fair to credit Franklin with laying the ground-work of the American acquisitive ethic.

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

"Remember, that time is money . . . Remember, that credit is money. If a man lets money be on my hands after it is due, he gives me the interest, or so much as I can make of it during that time. Remember, that money is of the prolific, generating nature. Money can beget money, and its offspring can beget more, and so on. Remember this saying, '*the good paymaster is lord of another man's purse.*' He that is known to pay punctually and exactly to the time he promises may at any time and on any occasion raise all the money his friends can spare . . . The most trifling actions that affect a man's credit are to be regarded. The sound of your hammer at five in the morning or eight at night, heard by a creditor, makes him easy six months longer; but if he sees you at a billiard table or hears your voice at a tavern, when you should be at work, he sends for his money the next day."

Remember, remember. Remember, in the matter of sex,

its utilitarian aspect; sexualize to promote health or for the sober procreation of children; "do not marry for money, but marry where money is." If as a young man you cannot afford to marry, choose your mistress wisely, preferably an older woman, since a pretty face adds nothing of utility or substantial enjoyment to the transaction and moreover the older women are so grateful."

Franklin was careful to be good because, honesty being the best policy, it paid him to be good. And when he was not careful to be good, he was careful to be careful.

"I grew convinced that truth, sincerity and integrity in dealings between man and man were of the utmost importance to the felicity of life . . . Revelation had indeed no weight with me as such; but I entertained an opinion that, though certain actions might not be bad because they were forbidden by it, or good because it commanded them, yet probably those actions might be forbidden because they were bad for us, or commanded because they were beneficial to us in their own nature, all the circumstances of things considered."

The utilitarian point of view could scarcely be made more explicit. But Franklin achieved a further logical extension of the utilitarian philosophy, to which Weber calls attention in "The Protestant Ethic."

"Now, all Franklin's moral attitudes are colored with utilitarianisms. Honesty is useful, because it assures credit; so are punctuality, industry, frugality, and that is the reason they are virtues. A logical deduction from this would be that where, for instance, the appearance of honesty serves the same purpose, that would suffice, and an unnecessary surplus of this virtue would evidently appear to Franklin's eyes as unproductive waste. And as a matter of fact, the story in his autobiography of his conversion to those virtues, or the discussion of the value of a strict maintenance of the appearance of

modesty, the assiduous belittlement of one's own desserts in order to gain general recognition later, confirms this impression. According to Franklin, those virtues, like all others, are only in so far virtues as they are actually useful to the individual, and the surrogate of mere appearances is always sufficient when it accomplishes the end in view. It is a conclusion which is inevitable for strict utilitarianism."

Compare this accurate characterization of Poor Richard's credo with the attitude of the manufacturers of Creomulsion, a proprietary remedy, expressed in a form letter designed to coerce newspaper publishers into attacking the Tugwell Pure Food and Drugs Bill:

Gentlemen: You are about to lose a substantial amount of advertising revenue from food, drug, and cosmetic manufacturers. Your pocketbook is about to be filched and you will see how if you will personally study . . . the enclosed copy of the Tugwell Bill. This bill was introduced by *two doctors*. . . . You publish your paper for profit and as a service to your community. *In most virile business organizations the altruistic policies in the final analysis are means to the primary end which is profit.* (My italics J. R.) . . . An isolated editorial or two will not suffice. . . . You need to take an aggressive stand against this measure. You need to bring all personal pressure you can upon your senators and representatives. You need to enlighten and thereby arouse your public against this bill which is calculated to greatly restrict personal rights. If this bill should become law we will be forced to cancel immediately every line of Creomulsion advertising. . . .

Surely the italicized sentence expresses the essence of the Poor Richard Philosophy and shows that the wisdom of Benjamin Franklin still lives in the hearts and minds of his countrymen, especially those who, like the manufacturers of Creomulsion, are engaged in manipulating the techniques of rule by advertising.

Vernon L. Parrington, in the third volume of his *Main Currents of American Thought,* remarks that "in certain respects Jay Cooke may be reckoned the first modern American." He financed the Civil War, and in the course of his operations developed and used on the grand scale most of the techniques of the modern advertiser and mass propagandist. With the Liberty Loan drives in mind, compare Parrington's summary of Cooke's pioneering achievements.

Under his bland deacon-like exterior was the mind of a realist. . . . If he were to lure dollars from old stockings in remote chimney corners he must "sell" patriotism to his fellow Americans; and to do that successfully he must manufacture a militant public opinion. The soldier at the front, he announced in a flood of advertisements, must be supported at the rear. . . . To induce slacker dollars to become fighting dollars he placed his agents in every neighborhood, in newspaper offices, in banks, in pulpits—patriotic forerunners of the "one-minute men" of later drives. . . . He subsidized the press with a lavish hand, not only the metropolitan dailies but the obscurist country weeklies. He employed an army of hack-writers to prepare syndicated matter and he scattered paying copy broadcast. . . . He bought the pressings of whole vineyards and casks of pure wine flowed in an endless stream to strategic publicity points. Rival brokers hinted that he was debauching the press, but the army of greenbacks marching to the front was his reply. It all cost a pretty penny, but the government was liberal with commissions and when all expenses were deducted perhaps $2,000,000 of profits remained in the vaults of the firm to be added to the many other millions which the prestige of the government agency with its free advertising brought in its train.

Having successfully sold a war, Jay Cooke turned to selling railroad stock—specifically, the Northern Pacific. He kept much of his war publicity machine intact and used it

both for this purpose and to shape public opinion in regard to taxation funding, and the currency—naturally in his own interests. But the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War smashed Cooke's European bond-selling campaign and the fall of the house of Cooke precipitated the panic of '73.

Jay Cooke carried into the realm of national finance and politics the morals, ethics and philosophy of a frontier trader and real estate speculator. Profoundly ignorant of social or economic principles he wrote or had written for him contributions to economic theory which were little more than clumsy and transparent rationalizations of a money lender's greed. *But*—he was successful in amassing great wealth; hence he was, during his heyday, a popular hero whose opinions on any subject were listened to with great respect by his fellow Americans. Moreover, he was, as Parrington noted: "Scrupulous in all religious duties, a kind husband, a generous friend, benevolent in all worthy charities, simple and democratic in his tastes, ardently patriotic." As a man, he seems to have had neither blood nor brains—Franklin had both—but in his life and work he applied the middle-class virtues of Poor Richard to the acquisitive opportunities of the Gilded Age. So that to a people given over to the worship of money-progress and money-opportunity he was a kind of Moses, envied and revered in life by all classes and worshipped by his biographer.

In brief, he was a mean and sorry little parvenu; and one of the founding fathers of the religion of salesmanship and advertising. His career marks a step in the evolution of the American crowd hero, and in the evolution of the American pseudoculture.

P. T. Barnum

Salesmanship and showmanship are variants of the same technique and both find their sanctions in Franklin's utilitarian ethic. America's greatest showman belongs in the his-

torical sequence of American crowd heroes for a number of reasons. In him the doctrine of justification by works receives its extreme pragmatic application in "the people like to be fooled" and "there is a sucker born every minute." That this greasy faker, this vulgar horse-trading yokel could have successfully worn the cloak of piety all his life; that his autobiography, the prototype of the American success story, was for years an unrivaled best seller, standing alongside of Franklin's *Autobiography* and *Pilgrim's Progress* in many thousands of American homes; that he was, for multitudes of his fellow citizens a model American—all this is difficult to believe at this distance. Yet his biographer, M. R. Werner, supplies impressive evidence that it was so.

When you give one of your daughters away in matrimony, advise her to imitate Charity Barnum; when your son leaves home to try his luck on the ocean of life, give him Barnum for a guide; when you yourself are in trouble and misery and near desperation, take from Barnum's life and teachings consolation and courage.

Henry Hilgert, a Baltimore preacher, stood up in his pulpit and said this to his congregation and there is every reason to believe that he expressed with substantial accuracy the contemporary popular evaluation of the great showman. The man he was talking about started his career in a country store in Bethel, Connecticut, watering the rum, sanding the sugar and dusting the pepper that he sold to his fellow townsmen, cheating and being cheated, playing cruel practical jokes, all strictly in accordance with the savage mores of that idyllic New England community, where the public whipping post menaced the ungodly and suicides were buried at the crossroads. From this he advanced to running a public lottery and with the profits went to New York, where the advertising of Dr. Brandeth's Pills was helping James Gordon Bennett to lay the foundations of the modern American newspaper.

At thirty-one Barnum was writing advertisements for the Bowery Amphitheater at four dollars a week. He was a "natural" at the business and used his skill to get control of the American Museum where he began to advertise in earnest. When the posters of the negro violinist didn't pull, he changed them to show the violinist playing upside down. Then they pulled, and the customers didn't mind, because Barnum gave them a flea circus and a pair of albinos as added attractions. He advertised his theatrical performances as religious lectures, and the best and most devout people flocked to them. His advertisements of Joyce Heth, "the nurse of George Washington," the Japanese mermaid, the white whales, Jenny Lind and Jumbo drained the dictionary of adjectives. Modern movie advertising has added nothing new or better to the technique. He stood—with Tom Thumb—before kings. He lectured to thousands on power of will and success through godliness. He invested his money in factories and in real estate developments designed to house religious working men who didn't drink, smoke or chew. He went bankrupt, but with the $150,000 his creditors couldn't get he "came back" gloriously and made another fortune.

To the museum which Barnum gave to Tufts College there still come on Sunday afternoons good people from the surrounding suburbs who stand in awe before the stuffed carcass of Jumbo. And the college glee club still sings:

Who was P. T. Barnum?
The first in tents
And consequently hence
The first in the realm of dollars and cents.
The first to know
That a real fine show
Must have a gen-u-ine Jumbo.
The first to come
With the needful sum

To found our college mus-e-um!
Pee Tee Barnum!!

Henry Ward Beecher

Barnum had nerve, a kind of bucolic Yankee hardihood which enabled him to trade in godliness with the same poker-faced effrontery that characterized his circus barking. That, with a certain crude but vigorous histrionism, would appear to be his contribution to the evolution of the American crowd-hero type.

Henry Ward Beecher, in contrast, was a deplorable 'fraid-cat all his days. But he was a much more complex and interesting figure than the great showman, and embodied more richly the conflicting strains of the cultural heritage. He, too, was a middle-class crowd hero. Yet curiously, his unrivaled eminence as a preacher and editor, in a period when the influence of the church and the church press was enormous, never quite gave him the mass influence which Barnum clearly had. One reason for this, of course, was the scandal which clouded his later years. But there is perhaps another and even more important reason. Beecher, though a showman both by nature and by long training, had a private impurity which is incompatible with pure showmanship, pure salesmanship, pure money-making. Beecher took himself seriously. He was a faker, a liar and a cheat, as was Barnum, and at bottom he was just about as vulgar as Barnum. But Beecher had a personal mission—to repudiate the harsh Calvinism of his father, the loveless despotism of that barren Litchfield parsonage, and proclaim the gospel of love. So Henry Ward Beecher struggled; a scared child, he begged the love of women which he never earned; women whom he later repudiated. Seemingly they loved him; at least they never gave him the hatred which his cowardly betrayals richly deserved. Why? Perhaps because they pitied him and saw that he was struggling genu-

inely after his fashion; struggling to be himself, to defy the Calvinist God, to assert the rightness of the tremendous emotionality which was his greatest endowment. Victoria Woodhull, that extraordinary woman, probably came close to stating the truth about Beecher when she wrote:

> The immense physical potency of Mr. Beecher, and the indomitable urgency of his great nature for the intimacy and embraces of the noble and cultured women about him, instead of being a bad thing as the world thinks, or thinks it thinks, or professes to think it thinks, is one of the noblest and grandest endowments of this truly great and representative man. Plymouth Church has lived and fed, and the healthy vigor of public opinion for the last quarter of a century has been augmented and strengthened from the physical amativeness of Rev. Henry Ward Beecher.

How Beecher writhed when he read this! And with what maledictions the brethren of Plymouth Church rejected this intolerable tribute to their adored pastor! For it was not precisely Henry Ward Beecher's business to revolutionize the sexual mores of his time. Not his the stuff of which martyrs are made. Earlier in his career, Beecher had rejected this rôle. When his brother, his father, most of his more courageous parishioners had embraced the cause of abolition Beecher had played safe on the slavery question. Instead he had chosen as his pulpiteering stock in trade the denunciation of the liquor traffic. And the jibe of a distiller whom he had attacked was well earned:

> You cannot justify slavery by talking about the making of whiskey. . . . Why is thy tongue still and thy pen idle when the sentiments of thy brother and thy church on slavery are promulgated? Thou idle boaster—where is thy vaunted boldness? . . . You are greatly to be pitied, even by a distiller.

Just what was Henry Ward Beecher's business, his "useful-

ness" to the preservation of which he sacrificed friend after friend along with his own honor and decency? It was the preaching business. It was also indirectly the advertising department of the real estate business. In *Henry Ward Beecher: An American Portrait,* Paxton Hibben writes:

> The investment character of his church was a matter that every metropolitan minister of that day was expected to bear in mind. Pews were auctioned off to the highest bidder and church scrip bore seven per cent interest. A popular preacher was, also, a better real estate advertisement than whole pages of publicity. Indeed, such a preacher as Henry Ward Beecher proved, readily secured pages of publicity for the neighborhood in which he officiated. For it was the day when church going was the only amusement permitted the godly, and divine service received the attention from the press later accorded theaters and social activities.

Beecher had trained hard for this business. In a later lecture at Yale, which took the form of a success story, he said:

> I got this idea: that the Apostles were accustomed to feel for a ground on which the people and they stood together; a common ground where they could meet. Then they stored up a large number of the particulars of knowledge, which belonged to everybody; when they get that knowledge that everybody would admit, placed in proper form before their minds, then they brought it to bear upon them with all their excited heart and feeling.

It is not difficult to recognize this as essentially the formula of Mr. Barton's syndicated lay preachments. In fact, Beecher's pulpiteering and Barton's syndicated essays are essentially advertisements designed to "sell" the acquisitive society to itself. Beecher's method was in all important respects the method by which an advertising agency after appropriate "research" arrives at the most effective "copy slant" with which to sell a new toothpaste or a new gargle. The basic

conviction which underlies all these enterprises in showmanship, salesmanship and advertising is expressed in one of Mr. Barton's favorite mottoes: "There is somebody wiser than anybody. That somebody is everybody."

However, one must admit that although Beecher unquestionably had the authentic Big Idea, he was too neurotic and too blundering ever quite to come through as a successful advertising man. He was forever picking the wrong theme song at the wrong time. Take his attitude toward Lincoln:

> It will be difficult for a man to be born lower than he was. He is an unshapely man. He is a man that bears evidence of not having been educated in schools or in circles of refinement.

Thousands of middle class American parvenues took that view of Lincoln but it took a pompous blatherskite like Beecher to plump out with it from the pulpit of a Christian church. And many of Beecher's parishioners had sense enough to see that Lincoln was not merely a better man but a better politician than Beecher. But there we run again into Beecher's limiting private impurity. He was not merely a snob, but a sincere snob.

Beecher was to achieve worse flops than this. In the year 1887, when strikes were sweeping the country, Beecher undertook to rehabilitate his smirched reputation by coming out as the defender of "law and order" and "life, liberty, and *prosperity*" to quote his significant revision of Jefferson. He said:

> Is the great working class oppressed? . . . yes, undoubtedly, it is . . . God has intended the great to be great and the little to be little . . . the trades union, originated under the European system, destroys liberty. . . . I do not say that a dollar a day is enough to support a working man, but it is enough to support a man! . . . not enough to support a man and five children if a man would

insist on smoking and drinking beer. . . . But the man who cannot live on bread and water is not fit to live.

One can scarcely do better than to quote Paxton Hibben's comment on this catastrophic muff, which the cartoonists exploited for years afterwards:

As the slogan of a great crusade in the leadership of which Beecher could reconquer the esteem of the American public, this bread and water doctrine somehow lacked pulling power.

Beecher was not so much a cynic as a charlatan, and the limiting vice of charlatans is that they tend to take themselves seriously. That is bad business and the more sophisticated charlatans like Elbert Hubbard are careful not to handicap their operations by private impurities of this sort. Moreover, Beecher was sloppy and careless. Take his flier in advertising in connection with Jay Cooke's Northern Pacific promotion operations.

In January, 1870, Beecher received $15,000 worth of Northern Pacific stock for the express purpose of influencing the public mind to favor the new railroad. Beecher's aid was to include the use of the *Christian Union,* a newspaper which he edited. The matter came to light and Beecher was roundly denounced. The moral would seem to be that Beecher should have been more careful as were some of his parishioners, like "Tearful Tommy" Shearman, clerk of Plymouth Church, who were also in on the proposition. The modern method of accomplishing the required enlightenment of public opinion would have been for Jay Cooke to place a substantial advertising contract with the *Christian Union* and then threaten to cancel it if Beecher failed to "co-operate." Theodore Tilton, the man whose wife Beecher begged love from and whom he ruined and drove into exile—Theodore Tilton, also an editor,

told Jay Cooke to go to hell. But Tilton was a good deal of a man.

Beecher, like other divided souls, was not his own master. His physical amativeness appears to have been genuine, and he was an authentic sentimentalist, if there is such a thing. And he really did hate his father and his father's Calvinism. So in the end, when it was fairly safe to do so, Beecher came clean on one count. He denounced the Calvinist hell, whose flames had been licking his conscience for all those many years. Call it wish-fulfilment if you like, but Beecher stood up in Plymouth Church and said:

> To tell me that back of Christ is a God who for unnumbered centuries has gone on creating man and sweeping them like dead flies—nay, like living ones—into hell is to ask me to worship a being as much worse than the conception of a medieval devil as can be imagined. . . . I will not worship cruelty. I will worship love—that sacrifices itself for the good of those who err, and that is as patient with them as a mother is with a sick child.

On the whole this was a pretty good negative-appeal advertisement. But it wasn't entirely well-timed. Beecher had to alter the slant several times before he hit the bull's eye of public opinion—that wise "everybody" to whom he dedicated his "usefulness."

Not a pleasant figure, Beecher. Half sincere and more than half neurotic charlatans are never pleasant, nor are their lives at all happy. And in age their faces look like the wrath of God.

Elbert Hubbard

In the sequence thus far we have seen a statesman, a financier, a showman and a preacher, using the philosophy and techniques of salesmanship and presenting themselves, with greater or less success, as heroes for the admiration of the

crowd. None of them was a professional advertising man. But all of them were crowd leaders engaged in selling themselves; also in selling the middle-class acquisitive ethic, and in rounding out the body of rationalization which the expansion of American industrial capitalism required. Advertising, as Mr. Roy Dickinson, president of *Printers' Ink*, has pointed out, is not an independent economic or social entity. It is merely a function of business management, and all these American crowd heroes were business men, first, last and always.

In Elbert Hubbard, however, we encounter the advertising man *per se*, a professional of professionals. All the others had "callings" in which, to earn divine favor, they were obliged to be successful. To be successful they were obliged to employ the techniques of salesmanship, of showmanship, of advertising, since these were the most effective techniques of leadership and of rule in the system as they found it. But Hubbard was called to the pure priesthood of advertising from the beginning, and by his success in this "calling" became a crowd hero. True, they called him a great writer, and a great printer, but the rose of advertising smells the same by whatever name it is called; in effect he never wrote or printed anything *but* advertisements. This, as we shall see, is equally true of that other great professional, Bruce Barton.

Elbert Hubbard deserves much more careful and detailed study than he has received at the hands of his biographers. He was born in 1856 in Bloomington, Illinois, the son of a physician. At thirty he was already a highly successful advertising man in the employ of a Buffalo, N. Y., soap manufacturer; among the sales techniques which he helped to develop were the use of premiums and various devices of credit extension. In 1892, he had made enough money to retire and give himself a college education. He entered Harvard as an undergraduate, but soon gave it up. Obviously President Eliot and his academic co-workers didn't know what America was all about. Hubbard wasn't sure himself, but he had a hunch.

It was the period of rococo enthusiasms in art, in economics, in politics. Hubbard went to England, met William Morris, and cheerfully appropriated all the salable elements of Morris's social and aesthetic philosophy. He knew what he wanted, did Hubbard, and especially what he didn't want. He wasn't having any of Morris's militant socialism for one thing. As far as radicalism was concerned, Franklin's "surrogate of appearance" was what Hubbard required—in other words a "front." And in his later career as strike-breaker and big business apologist he discarded even that. As for art, Hubbard made haste on his return to America to debauch everything that was good in the Morris aesthetic and to heighten and distort what was bad to the proportions of burlesque. The quantity of typographic and other sham "craftsmanship" spawned by Hubbard's East Aurora workshop is too huge even to catalogue. Some of the de luxe editions he got out sold for $500 apiece. He knew his American self-made business man, did Hubbard, and the cultural "surrogates of appearance" which the tycoons of the nineties required for their libraries were hand-illuminated by a "genius"—long hair, flowing tie and everything—to the order of the patron.

The "people like to be fooled" said Barnum. But Hubbard was sharp enough to see that the enterprise required none of the elaborate paraphernalia of dwarfs, elephants and white whales that the pioneer showman assembled. Hubbard was a one-man circus, and a one-man Chautauqua. He edited and wrote a one-man magazine, *The Philistine,* and ran a one-man strike-breaking agency. A solo artist if ever there was one. True he had helpers and disciples, but none was ever permitted to share the limelight with the only original Fra Elbertus. His point of view about the help was accurately expressed in *A Message to Garcia.*

It is not book learning young men need, but a stiffening of the vertebrae which will cause them to be loyal to trust, to act promptly,

to concentrate their energies, do the thing, "carry a message to Garcia."

A hard taskmaster, the Fra, who got the efficiency idea early and gave it its necessary ethical and moral rationalization. Carping critics suggested that Hubbard's chief industry at East Aurora was working his disciples. But big business seized upon *A Message to Garcia* as a revelation from Sinai, and the Fra simply coined money from then on. Hubbard wrote in this classic manifesto which corporation executives bought and distributed by the hundred thousand to their employees:

"He would drop a tear for the men who are struggling to carry on a great enterprise, whose working hours are not limited by the whistle and whose hair is fast turning white through the struggle to hold in line dowdy indifference, slipshod imbecility and heartless ingratitude which but for their enterprise would be both hungry and homeless."

That, it would appear, was the only cause over which Elbert Hubbard ever dropped a genuine tear. It was his own cause because he was a capitalist in his own right. (By 1911, his plant at East Aurora included two hotels, a group of factory buildings, and a farm, and he had five hundred people on his payroll.) It was also the cause of the expanding capitalist economy and the correlative acquisitive ethic, which came to full maturity during the two decades preceding the war.

One wonders a little at the harshness with which Hubbard rebuffed the craving of the white-collar slave for "book-learning." He himself was a kind of philosophical and literary magpie who lined his nest with trifles gathered from the most recondite sources, both ancient and modern. These, after having received a Hubbardian twist, were dished up in the *Philistine* and the *Fra* as the authentic pot-distilled wisdom of the sage of East Aurora.

He wrote so beautifully, sighed the newspaper critics of

that May-tide of commercial sentimentality which piled high and shattered itself upon the realities of the war. In 1915, Elbert Hubbard went down with the Lusitania, and the *Literary Digest* in recording the event, quoted this tribute by Agnes Herbert which appeared in the London *Daily Chronicle*:

Give me, I pray you, the magic of Elbert Hubbard. None of your Hardys, your Barries, your Kiplings for me. The pen of Elbert Hubbard, an' it please you. . . . Scoffers called him a literary faker. On occasion he was so. He popularized his knowledge of the great philosophers and transposed them so that the man in the street who would avoid the original teachers as he would the plague, swallowed the carefully wrapped up wisdom gratefully. . . . Everything Elbert Hubbard touched was made beautiful by the magic of his mind. He was the greatest advertising writer in the States and his methods turned the crying of wares into a literary adventure. Each was a faceted gem not to be passed by.

This seems a little lush, perhaps. The tribute of one Harold Bolce, writing under the title "Hubbard, the Homo, Plus" in the *Cosmopolitan* for March, 1911, is more to the point.

Elbert Hubbard realized long ago that he was an heir of the ages and he has foreclosed. He is rich, happy, healthy and wise. He has the woman he loves. . . . He has struck pay dirt on Parnassus. . . .

"In addition to factories and fields, the Fra has at least a quarter of a million followers. Hubbard is not a crank. 'Whom do you represent?' was asked of Harriman when that great financier was beginning his remarkable career. 'I represent myself,' was the reply. Similarly Hubbard does. He does not even constitute a part of the movements his writings have helped to promote. . . .

"A New Thought convention was in session at his inn, the delegates paying full rates—and getting their money's worth. 'What is New Thought?' asked a journalist. 'Blamed if I know,' said Hubbard. . . . Mr. Hubbard is sane—as sane as a cash register.

In many ways he is, perhaps, the most roundly gifted genius since Benjamin Franklin."

The Fra's production of advertising copy, not counting his *Little Journeys to the Homes of the Great*—including the home of Lydia Pinkham's Vegetable Compound—was enormous. As Joseph Wood Krutch pointed out in *The Nation*,

He is the spiritual father of all the copy which begins with an anecdote about Socrates and ends with the adjuration to insist upon the only genuine article in soapless shaving cream. He taught the merchant swank.

Toward the end of Hubbard's career, he became overgreedy and overconfident. The small change of lecture fees and book royalties was not enough. He had become a pretty important fellow and felt that he was worth important money. His price on one recorded occasion, for a job of literary strike-breaking, was about $200,000. Does this sound excessive? It sounded a little high even to John D. Rockefeller and to Ivy Lee, his public relations counsel in the lamentable affair of the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company. The correspondence was reprinted in *Harper's Weekly*, Jan. 30, 1915, under the title, "Elbert Hubbard's Price," and the first letter is dated June 9, 1914.

Dear Mr. Rockefeller:

I have been out in Colorado and know a little about the situation there. It seems to me that your stand is eminently right, proper and logical. A good many of the strikers are poor, unfortunate, ignorant foreigners who imagine there is a war on [the bullets that riddled the strikers' tents at Ludlow were doubtless purely imaginary J. R.] and that they are fighting for liberty. They are men with the fighting habit preyed on by agitators. . . .

Hubbard went on to cite an article he had written about.

the Michigan copper country and said he was writing one about Colorado. He mentioned his mailing list of 1,000,000 names of members of Boards of Trade, Chambers of Commerce, Advertising Clubs, Rotarians, Jovians, schoolteachers, judges and Members of Congress. He quoted a price of $200 a thousand for extra copies of the issue of *The Fra* in which his planned article would appear. He concluded:

> Just here, I cannot refrain from expressing my admiration for those very industrious, hard-working people, Bill Haywood, Charles Moyer, Mother Jones, Emma Goldman, Lincoln Steffens and Upton Sinclair. Why don't you benefit the world . . . (by stating the Rockefellers' side of the case. J. R.)?

Elbert missed out on that one, although he was persistent enough. He played golf with the elder Rockefeller. He wrote repeatedly to the well-known Mr. Welborn, President of the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company. "Do I make myself clear, boys?" he seemed to be saying. He did. Ivy Lee cannily suggested that Elbert be permitted every facility to gather material for his article. Then if Mr. Welborn liked it, he could doubtless arrange about the price. Ivy Lee knew his Fra. He wasn't buying any pig in a poke from Elbert Hubbard.

The proposition, as the editor of *Harper's Weekly* pointed out, was in two parts:

1.) The Fra offered to sell his opinion.
2.) The Fra offered to make an investigation in support of his opinion.

The Fra's one-man Chautauqua came to Middletown, N. Y. when the writer was in high school and also working on the local daily paper. It came twice in fact. The first year Elbert lectured on *The March of the Centuries*. It was a hodge-podge of Thoreau, Whitman, Emerson, Michelangelo and who not. I recall being a bit puzzled, although I reported the lecture respectfully enough, as was proper considering the eminence

of the lecturer. The next year, I was a year older and so was the Fra. He was getting pretty seedy, in fact, I thought. Moreover, his lecture, under a different title, was word for word the same balderdash he had given us the year before. The next day in the columns of the *Middletown Daily Times-Press* I took out after him with shrill cries of rage. The owner of the paper was away and I had fun. The piece was picked up and reprinted widely. At the moment, as I remember it, Hubbard had got himself a rating as a Bohemian immoralist, so that the up-state editors had declared an open season on the Fra.

My employer, when he came back, was horrified. It was the first time in the history of his management that the paper had printed an unkind word about anybody. But the Fra didn't mind—it was just so much publicity grist for his mill. The public likes to be fooled.

There seems to be nothing final to say about Fra Elbertus except that he advertised and sold everything and everybody he could lay his hands on: William Morris, Michelangelo, Thoreau, Emerson, Karl Marx, Socrates and Paracelsus. And himself, Elbert Hubbard, a founding father of the advertising profession—"the most roundly gifted genius since Benjamin Franklin."