THE SCHOOL AND THE ADVERTISER: BY ELIZABETH KING MAURER

Johnny and Mary are starting to school. Johnny has on his head a Big Axe Flour cap, presented to him by the Big Axe Flour Company. Mary’s braids are tied with ribbons bearing the slogan, “Triabita, the Schoolgirl’s Breakfast Food,” presented to her by the Triabita Breakfast Food Company. Both carry their books in schoolbags mottoed thus: “The Little Bear Shoes bear brave Boys and Girls. Buy Little Bear.” Each has a blotter, an eraser, several book covers, a ruler, a calendar, a penholder, a pencil box and a note book. These articles of everyday use, given free of charge, set forth the advantages of every patent medicine, of every commodity to supply the known or anticipated wants of man, woman and child. They daily advertise doctor, lawyer, merchant, chief.

This is the first stage in school advertising. It may be called the unconscious stage, in which the psychology of the unconscious working of conscious suggestion plays the great role. And more; as the twig is bent, the tree is inclined. Gain the child and you have the parent.

We have long been familiar with these first modest efforts of the advertiser to gain a foothold in the school. Now comes the second stage, the active campaign which involves the entire school and which bids all the pupils work for the honor of their school and for the glory of “success.”

No isolated cap or ruler suffices for the “Live-wire” or “Challenge” salesman of today. The large city with its many public and private schools is the pioneer in the new method. A daily paper, several firms, shoe, furniture, drug, clothing, piano and hardware houses and two breweries in one of the larger cities recently pooled their interests and offered prizes of a one thousand dollar library, pianos, and cash for the school (or church society, which does not concern this article) having the most votes within a given time, said votes to be procured by buying the newspaper or any article from the stores within the charmed circle.

The children, duly encouraged, set about to gain votes. Every parent, relative, friend, or neighbor was “approached.” The two breweries offered votes for the labels and the blue ribbons that are their respective trademarks. Boys came in with bundles of dirty ribbons.

“Where did you get them?” asked the teacher.


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"That would have been almost dishonest, only everyone did it," said the principal of a large ward school to the writer.

Millions of votes came in. But it soon became evident that the race was not only to the swift, but mostly to the wealthy. One of the richest wards in the city finally got the prizes. Many of the parents and friends had bought papers by the dollar's worth. (Once a week there were fifty-votes coupons in them.) For the good of the cause, they had renovated their houses and their wardrobes with all manner of things new and costly; and as a tangible expression of their belief in education, they had drunk many an extra glass of beer.

The advertisers may now have the pupils in the schools, both individually and collectively. Their definite plans to capture the teachers bring us to the third stage. Is it the last? A well-known department store, notorious, by the way, for underpaying its clerks, makes the offer that the five teachers who get the most votes with purchases at the store, are to go abroad at the store's expense.

The several teachers and principals who are candidates have electioneering cards printed, as does any other candidate for office, modestly asking for your vote. This of course is necessary to bring their names before the voters. They must and do have henchmen, friends, relatives, but especially students, who work ceaselessly with those people who can procure votes.

Furthermore, the lazy and inefficient students will use dad's money to "work the teacher." Why not? Such methods are constantly used in later life, and tactics learned early will become second nature. School intrigues will thicken. But later life is full of tricks. He who enters a game, must abide by its necessary conditions. Moreover, if this scheme is, in one form or another, to be a permanent affair between merchant and school or teacher a complication at once arises. A powerful merchant, whether on the school board or not, can usually exert pressure in hiring teachers. The trade-drawing ability will then reckon among the necessary qualifications, so that carried to its logical conclusions, the matter is no longer so simple.

But if we grant the advertiser permission to enter the school, then we ought, in all fairness, to make regular provision that any and all may come into this fertile field; that text-book firms, merchants, newspaper men, breweries, and certainly patent-medicine venders may all combine in a grand vote-coupon orgy!

Does it pay, teacher and parent? Is it worth while to have the children's minds taken from their studies? Worth while to give impressionable minds early lessons in intrigue and buying, under the name of voting; or let them put teachers up to the highest bidder?

Is it, in a word, worth while, or is it beyond the bounds of legitimate advertising, to have the school put at the service of the market-place?