GREAT PARABLES

There were two mothers, and each had a sickly young son. The first mother summoned her son and said: "Thou art spindly and underweight. Verily, I fear for thy health. Here, take and eat these nutritious vegetables." But the boy sulked and put them aside with harsh words. And his mother said: "Trouble me not. Except as ye eat these bitter viands, which I have prepared for thine own good, ye shall have no desserts nor any other good thing." The mother continued to coax and threaten, but the boy ate not the vegetables and he waxed exceedingly cranky. But the mother relented not, for she feared for his character.

The second mother observed this and she said to herself, "Verily, I will seek a better way." And she arose and went to the wise elders. As she drew near, the elders cried, "Behold, take and try this new substance which is named 'soup.' Receive it with gladness, for in it are nutritious vegetables, disguised and hidden among mystic letters and other curious things." And she said to her son, "Do not fret, for the eating of this soup shall be fun, and for each bowl thereof thou shalt receive a gold star. And when thy chart overfloweth with stars, thou shalt arise and enter the great club and the elders will reveal unto you the secret handshake." And it came to pass that the boy waxed exceedingly robust and strong.

The first mother thought to condemn her child, for he was puny beside the other, he brought home ill news from school, and he desecrated the dinner hour with loud complaining. But the second mother chastised her, saying, "Blame not the child. Thou hast led him in the harsh olden ways, but at a cost that is not meet. Behold the new way which I have shown thee. My child partakes of what is best for the sake of fun, and there is no bitter cost. Fail no more. Go and do likewise."

Thus, had it been translated into biblical prose, might have read one of the great parables of American advertising in the late 1920s—the parable of the Captivated Child. Didactic advertising tableaux may be called "parables" not because they conform to prevailing definitions of Jewish, New Testament, or secular parables in every respect, but because they attempt to draw practical moral lessons from the incidents of everyday life. Like the parables of Jesus, these advertising stories employed stark contrasts and exaggeration to dramatize a central message. And, like the parables of Jesus, they sought to provoke an immediate decision for action.¹

Of course, we must not ignore the important respects in which advertising tableaux like that of the Captivated Child did not conform to the model of the biblical parables. The advertising parables offered comfortable rather than distasteful truths. They usually sought to persuade more through insinuation than confrontation, and they sought unthinking assent rather than active thought or new insight. They encouraged readers to assimilate the product into their present lives, not, as Saint DeScille writes of the biblical parables, to tear apart the "secure, familiar everydayness of their lives" in order to force them to a decision to live "by a different logic."² The individual advertiser sought no such reorientation to a new "moral logic." The usual extent of his message was "same logic, plus new product." Whereas the biblical parables have aptly been characterized as encounters with our sense of the limitations of reality, the parables of advertising promised readers no insurmountable limitations and offered a reality easily within the reach of their hearts' desires. In short, advertising parables bore much the same relationship to biblical parables as melodrama has traditionally been understood to bear to high art or tragedy.³

Advertisers found themselves attracted to this form, which we might now characterize more strictly as the "melodramatic parable," for practical reasons. As a story without an identifiable author, often presented in such a manner as to suggest either distilled folk wisdom or supernatural insight, the parable served to divert attention away from the advertiser as interested "seller" and toward the ad's message. Moreover, it was well adapted to the task of luring readers into active involvement.⁴ The parable, as one theologian notes, was "ordered in such a way as to get in gear with the hearer, engage him in the movement of the story, and release him at the end back into his own situation in such a way that the parable happens to the situation."⁵ That was just the kind of inducement to action that advertisers wanted. The parable invited the use of vivid, radical comparisons that would arrest attention. And the exaggerations and hyperbole of the biblical parables, which induced hearers to momentarily suspend disbelief for the sake of a dramatic presentation of the central moral point of the story, found a resonance in the melodramatic parables of advertising. Advertisers, too, wished to employ poetic license in conveying a lesson about the perfection or indispensability of the product. In adopting a form like that of the biblical parables, they often asked their audience to suspend incredulity as part of the "rules of the game" of parable-telling. Joseph McFadyen portrays Jesus as implicitly asking his listeners to discount the dramatically useful exaggerations and dislocations of his parables by understanding each parable as though it began "It is as if." Advertisers found the parable form convenient in seeking the same "as if" suspension of skepticism from the audience.⁶

The parable flourished in American advertising in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Several advertising parables were so frequently repeated and so effectively reduced to formulas that their entire story could eventually be suggested by a
phrase or two. These I have designated the "great parables" of the age. They did not directly invite interpretation on more than one level or challenge the audience to accept a new moral logic. Yet they did, in spite of their narrow, practical intent, incorporate some wider dimension of meaning. They reinforced (and even encouraged conversions to) a modern, secular "logic of living," as we shall see once we have examined them one by one.

The Parable of the First Impression

A flush of anticipation colored the cheeks of the beautiful young lady as her escort seated her at the elegant table. It was her first important dinner among the fashionables of the city's smart set. But as the butler served the first course, her thrilled excitement turned to terror. "From that row of gleaming silver on either side of her plate, which piece shall she pick up?" Suddenly she sensed, as a knowledgeable mother would have been able to advise, that her chance of being invited to such an affair again—in fact, her whole future popularity—would be determined by this crucial first impression of her "presence." As her social destiny hung in the balance, "She could feel every eye on her hesitating hand." 1

Even if she passed the test of "the Hesitating Hand," a young lady was certain to encounter many other fateful first-impression judgments. In "the Open Door" she and her husband faced the greatest social crisis of their five-year marriage: they had taken the bold step of inviting the vice-president in charge of sales and his wife to dinner. For days, the eager young wife planned the dinner menu. Her husband researched and rehearsed several topics for appropriate conversation. But both completely forgot about their tasteless front doorways, with its lack of beautifully designed woodwork. And neither realized how dreary and out-of-date was the furniture they had purchased soon after their marriage. Thus, all of their efforts at preparation came to naught, for their guests formed an indelible impression during those few seconds from the "touch of the bell" to their entrance into the living room. No fears of cooking or conversation could counteract that first impression of dowdy tastelessness and lack of modernity. It fatefully bespoke a deficiency in character and ambition. Twenty years later, with the husband still third-assistant for sales at the small branch office, they anxiously passed on to their children a hard-won bit of wisdom: "Your future may rest on what the Open Door reveals." 2

These re-enacted confabulations of late 1920s "tragedy of manners" advertisements suggest the drama and pathos with which copywriters could recount the popular parable of the First Impression. According to such tableaux, first impressions brought immediate success or failure. Clearly, the scenarios were fantastical. Yet the parable of the First Impression, for all its exaggerated dramatics, drew much of its persuasive power from its grounding in readers' perceptions of contemporary realities. In a relatively mobile society, where business organizations loomed ever larger and people dealt far more often with strangers, many personal interactions were fleeting and unlikely to be repeated. In large organizations, hiring and promotion decisions now often seemed arbitrary and impersonal. No longer were they generally predictable on the basis of accumulated personal connections and past interactions. The reasons why one man gained a promotion or one woman suffered a social snub had become less explicable on grounds of long-standing favoritism or old family feuds. In the increasingly anonymous business and social relationships of the age, one might suspect that anything—including a first impression—had made the crucial difference.

Warren Susman and Daniel Rodgers suggest the context of popular ideas within which the parable of the First Impression found ample sustenance when they describe the new advice manuals of the early twentieth century. These manuals revealed a fundamental shift: from a nineteenth-century "culture of character," which stressed morality and work discipline as prerequisites for success, to a new "culture of personality," which emphasized the cultivation of one's ability to please others. 3 Paula Fass's study of the peer society of college students in the 1920s indicates a high potential susceptibility to the parable of the First Impression among these business-oriented youths. She notes their emphasis on "externals of appearance and the accessories of sociability," their "scrupulous attention to grooming," and their heavy reliance on instantly recognizable displays of status calculated to create a desired impression. 4 Like many others, they perceived that the rapid tempo of the age, and the larger scale and relative impersonality of business and social life, invited decisions based on anonymous judgments and quick impressions. One was never sure what minor and superficial considerations one's casual acquaintances might take into account.

Sensing its power in these circumstances, a variety of advertisers made use of the parable of the First Impression. Often they modified the basic formula of the tableau slightly to fit their particular product. Clothing manufacturers stressed overall appearance; gum, toothpaste, and toothbrush makers promised a "magic road to popularity in that first winning smile" (Fig. 7.1). Williams Shaving Cream
recommended that powerful initial impact of "the face that's fit" for the "double-quick march of business." All agreed that "it's the 'look' of you by which you are judged most often." One of the most important effects of preparing carefully for that crucial first impression, many of the ads suggested, was the sense of self-confidence it created. "The man who looks like business, meets better business more than half-way," assured Williams Shaving Cream. A lovely frock, washed in Lux, would enable any woman to overcome an inferiority complex and feel a "deep, sure, inner conviction of being charming," Dorothy Dix counseled readers of the Ladies' Home Journal. The House of Kuppenheimer confided to the up-and-coming young man that "someday your father may tell you how a certain famous letter 'K' in his inner coat pocket ... put confidence in his heart ... the confidence born of good appearance. And so helped him land his first job."

The disastrous results of a similar case, in which the leading man had failed to prepare himself for a positive first impression, were graphically displayed by the Cleanliness Institute of the Association of American Soap and Glycerine Producers. In the tableau, a salesman sitting in front of the desk of a business executive glanced back nervously over his shoulder at a huge specter of himself posed with one hand to his face in an embarrassed, self-conscious gesture. As the executive's impression formed, the salesman realized why he was failing to "put it over" (Fig. 7-2). Capitalizing on an increasing public uncertainty that true ability and character would always win out in the scramble for success, advertising parables of the First Impression stressed the narrowness of the line that separated those who succeeded from those who failed. Many men possessed relatively equal abilities. The intensity and evenness of the competition gave great import to every detail of one's appearance. Far from deploring the apparent trend toward judging people on superficial externals, advertising tableaux often suggested that external appearance was the best index of underlying character. People were always—necessarily and appropriately—looking for quick clues to your taste and character. If they found these in the cut of your clothes, the brightness of your teeth, the age and taste of your furniture, your inept choice of silverware, or the closeness of your shave, they judged appropriately in a world of quick decisions. If your outer appearance, and that of your home, failed to reflect your true qualities of taste and character, you had no one to blame but yourself.

The power of the parable of the First Impression stemmed from the presumption that these impressions, any one of which might constitute a crucial victory or defeat, occurred constantly and almost instantaneously. Only because she was constantly prepared could the heroine of a Dr. West's toothbrush tableau pass "The Smile Test" during that moment when a handsome man picked her up from a fall off a speeding toboggan. "How often trivial incidents change the whole course of our existence," philosophized Dr. West. Such "great moments" allowed no opportunity for last-second preparations and no second chances. Like death or the "Second Coming," the impression that might determine one's opportunity for social acceptance, marriage, or a promotion might come at any time, in its terrible swiftness and finality, catching one unprepared for social salvation. "In the flicker of an eyelid," warned Camay soap, "a man—another woman—will appraise your looks." A "charming hostess" who failed to obtain stylish new furnishings would

---

He had to fight himself so hard... he didn't put it over.

"Yes, he was his own worst enemy. His appearance was against him and he knew it. Oh, why had he neglected the bath that morning, the shave, the change of lines? Under the other fellow's gaze it was hard to forget that cheap tattoo. There's self-respect in soap and water. The clean-cut type can't fool any man in the face and tell him the facts— for when you're clean, your appearance lights up for you.

There's self-respect in SOAP & WATER

Even in the age of Eugene O'Neill, advertising managed to surpass the theater in graphic materializations of the subliminal.
henceforth be condemned to "lonely afternoons, dreary evenings" for being unprepared for acquaintances who "called once out of courtesy" but never came again. One ardent suitor completely destroyed the good impression he had built up over months "when she noticed a hint of B.O." as he knelt to pop the question. There was no appeal from such judgments, no way to escape the constant surveillance. Throughout life, the Cleanliness Institute counseled, "Everywhere we go the people we meet are sizing us up. Very quickly they decide whether we are, or are not, from nice homes." As advertisers of home furnishings came to recognize the persuasive power of the parable of the First Impression, judgments about "niceness" pushed beyond the test of personal appearance, even beyond first impressions of entrances and parlors, to include the entire home. Its external appearance and internal furnishings revealed the taste and character of the family within. Johns-Manville argued that roofing shingles bespoke "the taste and standing of the family," and Sherwin-Williams cautioned that "many a man has been rated as lacking in community spirit—-even as a business failure—merely because of a paint-starved house." One cement manufacturer even challenged readers: "Would you willingly be judged by the looks of your basement walls?" Furniture manufacturers warned that since people used their homes "for social and business advancement...and interesting, worthwhile people judge you by what your rooms reveal." Since the whole atmosphere of the home was "so clearly linked with the personality of its occupants," each room might well "betray owners laggard in ambition and insensitive to beauty, charm, and uplifting influence." Advertisers of bathroom furnishings and fixtures boldly applied the parable of the First Impression to the innermost recesses of the home. If every room told a story, then this most hidden and intimate of rooms would most clearly reveal family character. In "The Room You Do Not Show," discerning visitors would find a quick, authentic index to your standards and "your beliefs on how a civilized person should live." Would you like to have visitors go into your bathroom and see the towels that are there all the time? inquiried Cannon Towels challengingly. The Kohler company, manufacturer of bathroom fixtures, noted: "Quality tells—quality shown not so much by the coat you wear and the car you drive, the things the grocer's boy can see, but in the more intimate evidences of training and insight, in the vital corners of the home that give away your true philosophy of life. No room in the house is more expressive than the bathroom." The C. F. Church Manufacturing Company narrowed the focus even further: "The bathroom, most of all, is a clue to the standards of the household and the most conspicuous thing in the bathroom is the toilet seat." Little wonder that the man in the Brunswick-Balke-Collender Company catalogue, who had just learned of the impending visit of an influential business associate, thought first of the "old-fashioned wood toilet seat" as his mind's eye quickly scanned his house for social flaws.

Such social tableau advertisements convinced economist Paul Nystrom that advertising was "necessarily the enemy of privacy." "Critical eyes are sizing you up right now" was an integral element in the parable of the First Impression (Fig. 7.3). In advertising tableaux, friends, casual acquaintances, and strangers peered under people's rugs or inspected their handwriting for such signs of deficient

character as might be revealed by a leaky pen. They retreated with disgust from bathrooms in which the "otherwise perfect appearance" had been spoiled by a "mused towel" or a "slow-draining, gurgling lavatory." Kohler headlined one advertisement with the inviting phrase "our neighbors are the nicest people." But a wary reader, well-schooled in the parable of the First Impression, might have quickly turned the page, not wishing to be reminded that the nicest people were also those most likely to invade the "vital corners" of one's home to judge one's character and standards.

No other medium of popular culture preached the parable of the First Impression with the insistence of advertising. From no other source did people receive such frequent reminders that other people were constantly sizing them up and whispering about them behind their backs, or that they had so many possible reasons to feel a sense of social shame. Movies and comic strips sometimes depicted "love at first sight" or invited their audiences to join protagonists in making snap judgments. But these media usually subsequently revealed that initial impressions and assumptions had been inaccurate, thus conveying—often through humor—a moral lesson against the hasty judgment. Romantic magazine fiction, and later the radio soap operas, often emphasized the cutting social judgments of whispering gossips. But the gossips in these genres were nearly always cast in stereotyped negative roles.
The advertisements, by contrast, rarely questioned the truth of the parable of the First Impression. By clear implication, they accepted the efficacy and validity of the gossips' judgments (see Figs. 1.4, 1.5). Most ads equated other people's judgments with correct standards of appearance, cleanliness, taste, and modernity. Occasionally, superficial judgments might be characterized as unjust, but they were nevertheless presented as inevitable. One paint industry advertisement conceded that two gossips might be "unfair" in concluding that another family "must be hard up" because their house needed a new coat of paint. "But unfair or not," the ad gravely admonished readers, "we cannot escape the opinion of other people."

The merchandising strategy underlying the parable of the First Impression was obvious. People would certainly display more concern for the details of their personal appearance and that of their home if they could be induced to scrutinize themselves through the eyes of other people and to conceive of every aspect of external appearance as an index to their true character. But such an appeal could only succeed in a society which had come to doubt that a person's true character and worth were adequately revealed and judged in other, less superficial, ways.

Advertising men knew from their personal experience in the business world that first impressions did make a difference. The shifting, uncertain relationships in the field of advertising, the processes by which advertisements gained approval from clients, and the apparently fickle tastes of consumers in response to various advertising appeals, all encouraged them to conclude that, in many aspects of life, externals counted for more than intrinsic qualities. Working in an urban, sophisticated milieu, and impressed by the increasing complexity and ambiguity of business and social relationships, advertising men sensed that the parable of the First Impression had become a plausible explanation for how things worked in this "new world" that they knew and that others were increasingly coming to encounter.

Exterals were more significant in a mobile, urban, impersonal society. As a leading citizen of "Middletown" commented to a member of Robert and Helen Lynd's research staff in the mid-1920s, "You see, they [people] know money: they don't know you." By applying that money, through products, to your wardrobe, your face, your automobile, or your bathroom, you might manipulate their judgments in your favor. It might have been pure fantasy to suggest, as Tumbler Car Polish did, that a woman would break a social appointment because her husband had bought the wrong car polish and thus invited a bad first impression through "motor car dullness," or to imply, as Paris garters did, that a woman would reject the marriage proposal of an otherwise desirable mate simply because his socks sagged (Fig. 7.4). But the parable of the First Impression would never have appeared in such extreme variations if advertisers had not sensed that it reflected a common public perception of how society really worked in an age of shifting relationships.

In their own pragmatic search for merchandising triumphs, advertisers were exploring the implications of changing conceptions of the relation of the individual to society that later writers were to characterize as a shift from a "character ethic" to a "personality ethic." Already in the late nineteenth century, T. J. Jackson Lears notes, the interdependence fostered by urban, market relationships had undermined individual autonomy and engendered the idea of a fragmented "discontinuous self," comprised only of "a series of manipulable social masks." Modern identity, in Peter Berger's phrase, had become "peculiarly open." In an interdependent world of fragile institutions and shifting opportunities, individuals had to be prepared to transform themselves for new roles and new opportunities, thus making themselves "peculiarly vulnerable to shifting definitions" of themselves by others. Moreover, modern life induced a perception of living "constantly in a crowd," Warren Susman argues. This inspired individuals to play roles or create traits that would distinguish them from the mass and make others think of them as "somebodies,"
When Dale Carnegie's bestseller, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, appeared in 1936 it seemed to epitomize the new "personality ethic." Carnegie emphasized the responses of other people as the main obstacle to success. But advertisers, in parables of the First Impression, had already thoroughly explored the merchandising possibilities inherent in a modern fragmentation of selfhood. Ads with such leading questions as "Do you know how to be yourself?" and "Can a woman change a man's idea of her personality?" had explained how a perfume or nail polish might resolve a woman's identity crisis.  

Like other versions of the parable of the First Impression, such ads reinforced Americans' growing perception that they must create their own identities in the face of superficial and unsympathetic judgments by impersonal others. Advertisers did not create the "identity crisis," but they welcomed the opportunity to dramatize it. They then stepped forward as personal counselors on how to meet the scrutiny of judgmental others and how to succeed by "looking the part."

Thus the parable of the First Impression dramatized popular apprehensions about a society moving toward depersonalization. Frequent reiterated, in ever-expanding conceptions of possible sins against good taste and social presentability, these "tragedy of manners" tableaux Increased public awareness of the ways one could offend others or fail to live up to their expectations. To some, the parable of the First Impression may have stimulated the hope that they could win over the potentially unfair judgments of an anonymous society. Through a self-conscious attention to putting on the right face, they might turn the tables and manipulate the attitudes of those who scrutinized them so constantly but so superficially. To others, the cumulative effect of sundry advertising versions of the parable of the First Impression must certainly have been to intensify their sense of social insecurity. Martha Wolfenstein and Nathan Leites have noted a frequent pattern in American movies of the 1920s through the 1940s in which the audience was invited to identify with innocent characters who "are accused by themselves." They attribute these "nightmarish" but eventually triumphant encounters of the innocent with unfair judgments of guilt to "intense self-accusations" by Americans.

At most, advertising could only have acted as one of a number of forces in American society contributing to a tendency toward self-accusation. But it had obviously discovered a sensitive social nerve to stimulate and exploit. Whereas movies and soap operas often provided vicarious experiences of triumphs over society's false accusations, advertisements emphasized the power, validity, and pervasiveness of the world's judgmental scrutiny. With headlines such as "When they look at your feet on the beach," "Suppose you could follow yourself up the street... What would you see?" and "more searching than your mirror... your husband's eyes," they encouraged the transformation of this scrutiny into self-accusation. Their cumulative effect was more likely to reinforce the readers' impression of being surrounded by a host of accusing eyes than to reassure them that new furniture, familiarity with good silverware, or "a face that's fit" would testify to their "innocence" and spare them social shame (Fig. 7.5).

**The Parable of the Democracy of Goods**

As they opened their September 1929 issue, readers of the *Ladies' Home Journal* were treated to an account of the care and feeding of young Livingston Ludlow Biddle III, scion of the wealthy Biddles of Philadelphia, whose family coat-of-arms graced the upper right-hand corner of the page. Young Master Biddle, mounted on his tricycle, fixed a serious, slightly pouting gaze upon the reader, while the Cream of Wheat Corporation rapturously explained his constant care, his carefully regulated play and exercise, and the diet prescribed for him by "famous specialists." As master of Sunny Ridge Farm, the Biddles' winter estate in North Carolina, young Livingston III had "enjoyed every luxury of social position and wealth, since the day he was born." Yet, by the grace of a modern providence, it happened that Livingston's health was protected by a "simple plan every mother can use." Mrs. Biddle gave Cream of Wheat to the young heir for both breakfast and supper. The world's foremost child experts knew of no better diet; great wealth could procure no finer nourishment. As Cream of Wheat's advertising agency summarized the central point of the campaign that young Master Biddle initiated, "every mother can give her youngsters the fun and benefits of a Cream of Wheat breakfast just as do the parents of these boys and girls who have the best that wealth can command."

While enjoying this glimpse of child rearing among the socially distinguished, *Ladies' Home Journal* readers found themselves schooled in one of the most pervasive of all advertising tableaux of the 1920s—the parable of the Democracy of Goods. According to this parable, the wonders of modern mass production and
distribution enabled every person to enjoy the society’s most significant pleasure, convenience, or benefit. The definition of the particular benefit fluctuated, of course, with each client who employed the parable. But the cumulative effect of the constant reminders that “any woman can” and “every home can afford” was to publicize an image of American society in which concentrated wealth at the top of a hierarchy of social classes restricted no family’s opportunity to acquire the most significant products. By implicitly defining “democracy” in terms of equal access to consumer products, and then by depicting the everyday functioning of that “democracy” with regard to one product at a time, these tableaux offered Americans an inviting vision of their society as one of incontestable equality.

In its most common advertising formula, the concept of the Democracy of Goods asserted that although the rich enjoyed a great variety of luxuries, the acquisition of their one most significant luxury would provide anyone with the ultimate in satisfaction. For instance, a Chase and Sanborn’s Coffee tableaux, with an elegant butler serving a family in a dining room with a sixteen-foot ceiling, reminded Chicago families that although “compared with the riches of the more fortunate, your way of life may seem modest indeed,” yet no one—“king, prince, statesman, or capitalist”—could enjoy better coffee. The Association of Soap and Glycerine Producers proclaimed that the charm of cleanliness was as readily available to the poor as to the rich, and Ivory Soap reassuringly related how one young housewife, who couldn’t afford a $780-a-year maid like her neighbor, still maintained a significant equality in “nice hands” by using Ivory. The C. F. Church Manufacturing Company epitomized this version of the parable of the Democracy of Goods in an ad entitled “a bathroom luxury everyone can afford”: “If you lived in one of those palatial apartments on Park Avenue in New York City, where you have to pay $2,000.00 to $7,500.00 a year rent, you still couldn’t have a better toilet seat in your bathroom than they have—the Church Sani-white Toilet Seat which you can afford to have right now.”

Thus, according to the parable, no discrepancies in wealth could prevent the humblest citizens, provided they chose their purchases wisely, from retiring to a setting in which they could contemplate their essential equality, through possession of an identical product, with the nation’s millionaires. In 1929, Howard Dickinson, a contributor to Printers’ Ink, concisely expressed the social psychology behind Democracy of Goods advertisements: “With whom do the mass of people think they want to forfend? asks the psychologist in advertising. ‘Why, with the wealthy and socially distinguished, of course! If we can’t get an invitation to tea for our millions of customers, we can at least present the fellowship of using the same brand of merchandise. And it works.”

Some advertisers found it more efficacious to employ the parable’s negative counterpart—the Democracy of Afflictions. Listerine contributed significantly to this approach. Most of the unsuspecting victims of halitosis in the mid-1920s possessed wealth and high social position. Other discoverers of new social afflictions soon took up the battle cry of “nobody’s immune.” “Body Odor plays no favorites,” warned Lifebuoy Soap. No one, “baker, baker, or society woman,” could count himself safe from B.O.77 The boss, as well as the employees, might find himself “caught off guard” with dirty hands or cuffs, the Soap and Glycerine Producers assured readers of True Story. By 1930, Absorbine Jr. was beginning to document the democratic advance of “athlete’s foot” into those rarefied social circles occupied by the “daintiest member of the junior set” and the noted yachtsman who owned “a railroad or two” (Fig. 7.6).14

The central purpose of the Democracy of Afflictions tableaux was to remind careless or unsuspecting readers of the universality of the threat from which the product offered protection or relief. Only occasionally did such ads address those of the upper classes who might think that their status and “fastidious” attention to personal care made them immune from common social offenses. In 1929 Listerine provided newspaper readers an opportunity to listen while a doctor, whose clientele included those of “the better class,” confided “what I know about nice women.” One might have thought that Listerine was warning complacent, upper-class women that they were not immune from halitosis—except that the ad appeared in the Los Angeles Times, not Harper’s Bazaar. Similarly, Forhan’s toothpaste and the Soap Producers did not place their Democracy of Afflictions ads in True Story in order to reach the social elite. Rather, these tableaux provided enticing glimpses into the lives of the wealthy while suggesting an equalizing “fellowship” in shared susceptibilities to debilitating ailments. The parable of the Democracy of Goods always remained implicit in its negative counterpart. It assured readers that they could be as healthy, as charming, as free from social offense as the very “nicest” (richest) people, simply by using a product that anyone could afford.

Another variation of the parable of the Democracy of Goods employed historical comparisons to celebrate even the humblest of contemporary Americans as “kings in cottages.” “No monarch in all history ever saw the day he could have half as much as you,” proclaimed Paramount Pictures. Even reigning sovereigns of the present, Paramount continued, would envy readers for their “luxurious
freedom and opportunity" to enter a magnificent, bedazzling "palace for a night," be greeted with fawning bows by liveried attendants, and enjoy modern entertainment for a modest price (Fig. 7.7). The Fisher Body Corporation coined the phrase "For Kings in Cottages" to compliment ordinary Americans on their freedom from "hardships" that even kings had been forced to endure in the past. Because of a lack of technology, monarchs who traveled in the past had "never enjoyed luxury which even approached that of the present-day automobile." The "American idea," epitomized by the Fisher Body Corporation, was destined to carry the comforts and luxuries conducive to human happiness into "the life of even the humblest cottagers." 462

Even so, many copywriters perceived that equality with past monarchs might not rival the vision of joining the fabled "Four Hundred" that Ward McAllister had marked as America's social elite at the end of the nineteenth century. Americans, in an ostensibly conformist age, hungered for exclusivity. So advertising tableaux celebrated their ascension into this fabled and exclusive American elite. Through mass production and the resulting lower prices, the tableaux explained, the readers could purchase goods formerly available only to the rich—and thus gain admission to a "400" that now numbered millions.

The Simmons Company confessed that inner-coil mattresses had once been a luxury possessed only by the very wealthy. But now (in 1930) they were "priced so everybody in the United States can have one at $19.95." Woodbury's Soap advised the "working girl" readers of True Story of their arrival within a select circle. "Yesterday," it recalled, "the skin you love to touch" had been "the privilege of one woman in 65," but today it had become "the beauty right of every woman." 463 If the Democracy of Goods could establish an equal consumer right to beauty, then perhaps even the ancient religious promise of equality in death might be realized, at least to the extent that material provisions sufficed. In 1937 the Clark Grave Vault Company defined this unique promise: "Not so many years ago the use of a burial vault was confined largely to the rich. . . . Now every family, regardless of its means, may provide absolute protection against the elements in vaults." 464 If it seemed that the residents of Clark vaults had gained equality with the "400" too belatedly for maximum satisfaction, still their loving survivors could now share the same sense of comfort in the "absolute protection" of former loved ones as did the most privileged elites.

The social message of the parable of the Democracy of Goods was clear. Antagonistic envy of the rich was unnecessary; programs to redistribute wealth were unnecessary. The best things in life were already available to all as reasonable prices. But the prevalence of the parable of the Democracy of Goods in advertising tableaux did not necessarily betray a concerted conspiracy or the part of advertisers and their agencies to impose a social ideology on the American people. Most advertisers employed the parable of the Democracy of Goods primarily as a narrow, non-ideological merchandising tactic. Listerine and Lifebuoy found the parable an obvious, attention-getting strategy for persuading readers that even society women and bankers were unconsciously guilty of social offenses, the readers themselves were not immune. Simmons Mattresses, Chevrolet, and Clark Grave Vaults chose the parable in an attempt to broaden their market to include lower-income groups. The parable emphasized the affordability of the product to families of modest income while attempting to maintain a "class" image of the product as the preferred choice of their social betters.

Most advertisers found the social message of the parable of the Democracy of Goods a congenial and unexceptionable truism. They also saw it, like the other parables prevalent in advertising tableaux, as an epigrammatic statement of a conventional popular belief. Real income was rising for nearly all Americans during the 1920s, except for some farmers and farm workers and those in a few depressed industries. Citizens seemed eager for confirmation that they were now driving the same make of car as the wealthy elites and serving their children the same cereal enjoyed by Livingston Ludlow Biddle III. Advertisers did not have to impose the parable of the Democracy of Goods on a contrary-minded public. Theirs was the easier task of subtly substituting this vision of equality, which was certainly satisfying as a vision, for broader and more traditional hopes and expectations of an equality of self-sufficiency, personal independence, and social interaction.

Perhaps the most attractive aspect of this parable to advertisers was that it reached the coming of an equalizing democracy without sacrificing those fascinating contrasts of social condition that had long been the touchstone of high drama. Henry James, writing of Hawthorne, had once lamented the obstacles facing the novelist who wrote of an America that lacked such tradition-laden
The Parable of Civilization Redeemed

In 1930 the pharmaceutical firm of E. R. Squibb and Sons sought to capture the attention of readers for a dramatized version of a now-familiar fable. Employing a touch of the popular "believe-it-or-not" mystique, it introduced a note of mystery and irony into its advertising headline: "The interesting story of how man outwitted nature—and lost!" The revelation it had to offer, Squibb boasted, would be "another of those thrilling stories from the annals of modern science," a story of "how man, in his struggle to be civilized, became his own arch-enemy." In the beginning, Nature had prudently placed essential vitamins in the "coarse, plain foods she intended us to eat." But man, captivated by new and tempting tastes, had sought to make such foods more appetizing. In the process, he had "cooked and refined out of them" the very vitamins that Nature had foreseen would be necessary for good health. "Today," Squibb sermonized, "we are paying the penalty for this mistake. Civilized ills plague us—ills caused by an incomplete diet of highly refined foods."

Had the story ended there, the parable would have remained a simple jeremiad. It might even have suggested a return to the purer, less decadent practices of yore. But the fable contained a second irony. If Nature, in its instinctive wisdom, now sought to punish civilized mankind for its waywardness, then Civilization, in its own sophisticated wisdom, had found a way to regain Nature's intended gifts without sacrificing the fruits of progress. Squibb's Vitamin Products would lift the curse that Nature had unthinkingly sought to inflict on Civilization.

Such was the parable of Civilization Redeemed. A familiar theme in the advertising tableaux, it usually varied from version to version only in the extent of its elaboration and in the particular form taken by Nature's curse. In proclaiming the victories over threats to health and beauty that the products of civilization now bestowed on Nature. In an era when the suntan first became fashionable and the ultraviolet ray an object of veneration, the virtues of Nature were not lightly dismissed. The point of the parable was that Civilization, which had brought down the curse of Nature upon itself, had still proved capable of discovering products that would enable Nature's original and beneficent intentions to triumph. Since it was inconceivable that civilized traits or habits, once attained, would ever lapse or be unacceptable penalties that an uncomprehending Nature sought to impose. The parable of Civilization Redeemed taught that the advance of civilization, temporary afflictions notwithstanding, need never exact any real losses. Civilization had become its own redeemer.

One of the deleterious by-products of civilization most often lamented in the advertising parables was the physical "softness" that came with refined, over-cooked foods and a decline in physical exercise. Pebeco toothpaste deplored the lack of exercise for mouth glands that had come with the "soft foods" of the modern diet. Without exercise to keep these glands "young" and active, tooth decay quickly ensued. Wrigley's Gum agreed that civilization had created grave
threats to the health and beauty of mankind because of "the lack of chewing required by our modern, soft foods." Since "charming lips" constituted the main factor in a woman's beauty, her charm was likely to fade rapidly under modern, civilized conditions that cheated facial muscles of the exercise needed to keep them supple. Wrigley urged readers to follow the example of the girls of the high-kicking chorus line, who recognized the necessity to "take every precaution to look and keep fit in all respects, and therefore avoided "flabby face lines" by chewing Wrigley's Spearmint Gum for exercise.

In their anxiety to dramatize the potential dangers of modern habits and conditions, advertisers occasionally invoked civilization with images of sloth or decadence. In an attack on the "soft fare of civilization," Ipana toothpaste introduced a hint of degenerate luxury by populating a restaurant scene with a heavy-set waiter, several languid ladies lounging about the central table, and a corpulent couple in the background. In another restaurant tableau, Ipana warned, "Eating today is a lazy pleasure." Other advertisers contrasted the physical "laziness" of modern civilization with the hard work that Nature had originally intended for such parts of the body as the teeth, the gums, the eyes, and the intestines. Grape-Nuts reminded readers that "Nature's plan" intended teeth for "hard work—and plenty of it." A Squibb Liquid Petroleum ad warned: "Civilization has cheated you. . . . Your intestines have gone lazy." Summing up the effects of overeating, insufficient sleep, and lack of exercise, Postum concluded: "Health is natural. Sickness is man-made." 32

The parable of Civilization Redeemed not only contrasted a healthful, hard-working past with an indifferent, potentially degenerate present; it also seemed, on occasion, to elevate ancient or "natural" men over civilized moderns. One Den- tyne Gum advertisement contrasted scenes of a contemporary girl lying listlessly in a sickbed and coveting curiously consuming their "tough wild meat" (Fig. 7:8). Another Dentyne ad contrasted "Mrs. B," who has "spent hundreds on her teeth and has six fillings and a bridge," with an Eskimo girl, "untouched by civilization," whose teeth remained perfect without dental work. 33 A General Electric ad idealized the Indian's power of distant vision before man moved into the dim light of an artificial, indoor world. And General Foods created a new, youthful, slender, and feminine image of the advertisers' favorite representative of natural vigor, the caveman (Fig. 7:9). 34

Few advertisements compare the past favorably with the present, but the parable of Civilization Redeemed diverged from this pattern. Many advertisements in the 1920s had betrayed an ambiguous attitude toward the traditional American virtue of hard work; several bluntly condemned hard work after expediently renaming it "drudgery." But when the parable of Civilization Redeemed associated the ancient past with the vigorous hard work of physical exercise, it clearly implied the moral superiority of the "natural" past over certain soft and lazy qualities of the present. Even so, the parable contemplated no turning back. "We could hardly revert to a diet of raw roots and unpeeled fruits," exclaimed Ipana. 35

The "superiority" of the past was a narrow, particular one; it did not have to be sacrificed on the altar of progress. Civilized man could enjoy both soft foods and tough gums, both "refined dishes" and healthy elimination. The advertised product offered the solution.

Physical softness, however, was not civilization's only affliction; the hurried, nervous pace of modern society also threatened people's health. Advertisements had frequently expounded on the nervous tempo of modern society and on the intense pressures of speed and competition in their own profession. They found it easy to evoke images of a frantic, nerve-shattering modern pace of life, especially when the product could be interpreted as an antidote. Ads for laxatives and vitamins conjured up vivid images of "hurried nervous lives" and "quick-step times," of people who "drive themselves until they drop." 36 Squibb's Vitamin Products depicted a "perilous" modern living regime: "Twenty-four hours of . . . noisy, crowded streets. Of dust and gas-ridden air. Of machine-made speed. Of strain. Of nervous tension." In prose that similarly matched the tempo of modern civilization, Post's Bran Flakes added its warning: "So the pace is fast; everything is abbreviated. The very food you eat is concentrated." 37

Advertisers of laxatives and "natural bulk" foods united in laying the blame for constipation directly at the doorstep of modern civilization. Fleischmann's Yeast eagerly quoted a British doctor's charge that constipation was "civilization's greatest curse" (see Fig. 1:7). Plugged intestines seemed both a literal and a symbolic manifestation of "the poisons of waste which too civilized people accumulate within themselves." Moreover, it proved easy to draw causal relationships
between the modern tempo and constipation. Men and women who were constantly "on the go from morning until night" became irregular in their habits. Because of "the strain and complexity of modern living," people were "daily driven to neglect." Life is too crowded, too hurried, too soft," moaned E. R. Squibb and Sons, manufacturers of Petrolatum. Such a life condemned men and women to "constipating, concentrating foods" with the result that "you suffer from sluggish intestines . . . you pay that price to civilization."98

Other advertisers discovered the effects of a hurried pace and nervous tension in other symptoms. Hurry and strain slowed up the action of mouth glands, causing tooth decay. Fatigue, overwork, and "rush eating" precipitated cases of "American Stomach," requiring Ovaltine as an antidote. The "nervarcwracking" speed of modern life dictated that the best workers would be the "high-strung" and the "sensitive-nerved," reported Herbert Tareyton cigarettes. Tareytons promised to soothe and steady the nerves of nurses, pilots, radio operators, stockbrokers, and those in hundreds of other tension-filled modern occupations.99 Even the pavements of modern civilization brought a "jumpsiness" and "irritability" not known to native African bearers who made their long safari treks, as nature intended, "on springy turf." As the United States Rubber Company, the maker of Spring-Step Rubber Heels, concluded: "Nerve exhaustion is the price we pay when we depart from nature's plan."100

Still, advertisers did not seek to slacken civilization's hurried pace of life. In fact, the very ads that blamed civilization for the ills of constipation and nervous fatigue often took delight in the pace of modern American life. Post's Bean Flakes glorified its protagonist, "Thompson," who was "head of a wall-street business, director in a dozen corporations, capable of long hours at fever pitch." Sal Hepatica encouraged women to keep "on the go," rushing "from one activity to another." Squibb declared, "Every hour of the twenty-four is precious!" and suggested that a woman who did not keep pace would miss "countless moments of gaiety and joy."101 Nupol, a laxative, greeted the new tempo with something approaching ecstasy: "Three times the amount of living crammed into every twenty-four hours, the pace of a ten years ago is tripled. Business, business, business!""102 evening affairs are merely time for changing clothes. Thus, night after night. Morning finds men and women rushing joyously through daily tasks. And they thrive on the pace that dizzyes bystanders.103

Far from questioning the course of civilization, then, advertisers encouraged readers to indulge even more fully in those modern habits that invited Nature's curse. Rather than avoid soft foods or slacken their pace, men and women could pursue their civilized habits and tastes with abandon, confident in the capacity of the advertised product to save them from any ill consequences. Since advertising men worked amid the atmosphere of deadlines and conflicting pressures, they could vividly convey the deleterious qualities of a fast-paced, "overcivilized" social and business life. By raising the specter of civilization destroying the balance of nature, they gave dramatic and sometimes exaggerated expression to the uncertainties of a wider public. After this cathartic airing of anxieties, they offered assurances, through the parable of Civilization Redeemed, that the apparent costs of progress could be avoided. Civilization and Nature were not antithetic. No brakes need be applied to the wheels of progress.

Advertising stories do not have unhappy endings; nor do advertising parables preach hard lessons. The parable of Civilization Redeemed was no exception. It confirmed Americans in one of their treasured common beliefs—the belief in unequivocal progress, in the compatibility of technology with the most desirable qualities of Nature. Squibb's headline—"The interesting story of how man outwitted nature—and lost!"—was a striking attention-grabber precisely because of its preposterous, believe-it-or-not quality. The content of every medium of American popular culture of the era affirmed that man was constantly outwitting nature through technological advances and never "losing" as a consequence. By exploiting apparent and incongruous exceptions to the principle of progress without cost, and by demonstrating man's capacity to prevent these unnecessary discomforts of civilization, the parable of Civilization Redeemed buttressed a central tenet of American folk wisdom.103

The ideology of advertising is an ideology of efficacious answers. No problem lacks an adequate solution. Unsolvable problems may exist in the society, but they are nonexistent in the world glimpsed through advertisements. Thus the parable of Civilization Redeemed simply stated explicitly the implicit message of all advertising. Many advertisements of the late 1920s that did not state the parable directly nevertheless reinforced its reassurances. The Scripps-Howard newspaper chain, for instance, advertised its civic-minded editorial policies by depicting a girl running through a park glen in healthy delight, while her family picnicked nearby. The city in the distance lay under the heavy smoke of urban pollution. Yet a park on the periphery of such a city, the ad implicitly claimed, could be a complete solution for city workers and their families (Fig. 7.10). Meanwhile
products ranging from yeast to Radiant Fire gas heaters promised to fully restore the sun's "vital rays" and "mysterious power" to a "sun-starved" modern race living indoors in schools, factories, homes, and offices.44

Sometimes, "solutions" to the apparent ills of civilization failed to bring the promised relief; yet even here, a new solution always appeared to resolve the apparent problem. During the early 1920s, motorizing had been promoted for its health value. People could refresh themselves and gain relief from nervous strain by motorizing in the fresh air of the countryside. But such gains were often offset, warned Watson Stabilizers (shock absorbers), because the need to constantly brace oneself "against a bad toss" had brought fatigue and "muscular tension."

Yet motorizing, as civilization's solution to the problem of tension—creating urban conditions, need not bring its own attendant ills. Watson Stabilizers would cushion the ride and restore motorizing to its promised role.65

Perhaps the consummate expression of the beliefs embodied in the parable of Civilization Redeemed appeared in advertisements in the early 1930s for Midol, a patent medicine for menstrual cramps. Warning that "Nature won't postpone her process to accommodate social engagements," Midol promised relief in seven minutes by working "directly on the organs themselves." In so doing, it proved the capacity of civilization's products to carry out the beneficent intentions of Nature. "The periodic process is natural," Midol explained, "but the painful part is not."56 That pain in any form—physical, social, or psychological—was "not natural" was a proposition that Americans most devoutly wished to believe.

Advertising, and particularly advertising tableaux of the parable of Civilization Redeemed, offered only encouragement to such wishful thinking.

The Parable of the Captivated Child

Mother was vexed, exhausted, almost driven to distraction. Bobby simply would not eat his carrots, even though mother had followed "all the suggestions laid down by authorities on child training." Her efforts to get him to eat the vegetables essential to his health had become a "pitched battle." This particularly disturbed mother since, as everyone now realized, forcing or strenuous coaxing would destroy her vital bond of companionship with her child. Equally upsetting was her realization that those "little outlaws," Bobby and his friends, were actively pursuing "their natural search for forbidden and untimely foods" away from home, outside of her control. Mother recognized her duty to shape Bobby's diet; yet angry confrontations and tearful refusals would prove her a failure as a mother. What to do?66

Fortunately, just during Bobby's most difficult years—from 1929 through 1933—the Campbell Soup Company offered a strategy to solve mother's dilemma. Realizing the hopelessness of the "pitched battle," Campbell's Soup ads recommended enticement rather than confrontation to bring a prompt "surrender" by balky and rowing outlaws. Attractive home meals of Campbell's Soups would captivate Bobby's appetite, restrain his search for forbidden foods, and eliminate the exhausting need for coaxing. "It's not vegetables to them," promised Campbell's, "it's just good soup." By following the simple strategy proposed by this parable of the Captivated Child, all mothers could mold their "little outlaws" into happy, healthy youngsters without the harsh discipline that might turn them into willful, "sulky foes." Mothers could avoid the negative effects of irritable coaxing and still bring "the end of the great rebellion."66

In seizing upon the parable of the Captivated Child, Campbell's Soups and a score of other advertisers fashioned popular theories of child guidance into a cogent merchandising strategy. Child psychology was riding a wave of popularity as a behavioral science. As new appliances lessened the time required for other domestic tasks, doctors, dieticians, psychologists, and other "authorities" explained to women new standards of child nurture. Some of these involved painstaking expertise in establishing complex and rigid schedules; others required time-consuming devotion to the development of empathetic yet manipulative emotional relationships. All of the new responsibilities encouraged women to invest more emotional energy in their role as mothers and to recognize that they would be judged more heavily than ever by their successes or failures in this role.

As child guidance authorities discerned more and more difficult "problems" in attaining the proper diet for children and in properly molding their behavior without destructive discipline, advertisers eagerly publicized those problems and offered their products as solutions.

Among the ideas of child guidance most widely popularized by advertisements, four assumptions were particularly crucial to the parable of the Captivated Child. The first of these was the notion that parents should maximize the personal development of the child through increased attention and companionship. "She needs you so!"—the message of a 1927 Cream of Wheat ad—reiterated the constant refrain.56 Children were malleable creatures; but their character was quickly set. "An hour of mothering now is worth a year of advice later on," one advertiser warned. "Unsupervised play was dangerous. "Far better when Mother is the companion. Far better when Mother guides the restless hands and moulds the plastic minds. General Electric warned that "the years of a mother's influence are only seven." In those first seven "fleeting years" a child's "dominant characteristics" were formed.71

Although the texts of such advertisements rarely explained the specific form that such parental influence should take, the illustrations suggested a kind of companionate guidance. Mothers, and occasionally fathers, were shown actively participating in play with the children—running with them through grassy fields, swinging them, gathering wildflowers with them, joining them in playing with a train. Other illustrations showed women reading to their children or simply watching them with full attention while they played. Some illustrations of mothers suggested a particularly solicitous attitude. They served or bent over children at the table with suppliant tenderness; they knelt almost reverently to adjust their clothes.72 Occasionally, guidance experts in the ads besought fathers, too, to get down on the child's level and be good companions. In an ad entitled "Dear Fathers," Cream of Wheat quoted one educator: "This year, make friends with
your son. Try to understand him and help him with his lessons, his conduct, his play. . . . Be a boy again.”

The 1920s was an era of more democratic, child-centered family relations for middle-class families; the advertising tableaux reflected and endorsed that transformation.

According to a second assumption of the parable of the Captivated Child, children would inevitably choose the wrong diet or acquire undesirable habits if left to themselves. Children naturally rejected certain foods that were best for them and resisted certain good habits because they found them bothersome and restrictive. Mothers bore a responsibility to protect each child’s health and mold its character in defiance of the child’s natural neglect or abhorrence of essential foods and habits.

A third critical assumption of the parable drew heavily on contemporary child-rearing literature. It barred parents from one method of acting in the child’s best interests by insisting that any attempt to “force” the proper diet and habits on the child would not only fail, but would undermine the empathetic approach to child nurture posited in assumption number one. “Don’t make your children dislike you,” warned Ex-Lax. Instead of forcing children to take “hateful doses and bitter cathartics that so often cause tears and tantrums,” a wise mother should tempt them with a candy-like laxative. “They’ll love it . . . and love you for giving it to them.” Advertisement after advertisement condemned the “forcing” of the “old discipline.” Don’t force, don’t coax, don’t plead, don’t scold, they repeated (Fig. 7.11). Coaxing and forcing, argued General Mills (Wheaties), often did more harm than good. Such conflicts might unwittingly turn “high spirited youngsters” into bally, tearful, even “perverse” children. Cream of Wheat fondly quoted the exclamations of the author of a child guidance book: “Bubbling over with mischief! How children chafe against restraint!” And rightly so. Restraint was unproductive and unnecessary. In many modern homes, according to another authority on child guidance, “sound habits are being learned—not through ‘must’ and ‘must not’ but by games.”

The woman, ignorant or neglectful of such advice, who scolded or coaxed her child was quickly relegated by advertising to the role of bad mother. Every tableau in which a mother punished, criticized, or showed bad temper toward her child characterized the mother as the guilty party (Fig. 7.12). To scold one’s child was to fail as a mother, to reveal one’s incompetence in what should be a woman’s most natural role. Often such behavior revealed a failure on the mother’s part to inform herself about the “sane ways” of leading rather than forcing the child. Since children who developed the habit, through confrontations, of behaving badly: the table were “often hard to manage otherwise, too,” good mothers never forced children to eat “a tasteless, unwanted cereal” for their own good.

These three axioms—parents should be companions to their children; children do not choose what is best for them; and children should not be forced or coaxed—the final basic assumption of the parable of the Captivated Child emerged as the only apparent solution to the problem of child management. The mother must become a deit but loving manipulator. With the indispensable aid of enticing products, she should use her child’s own tastes and interests to “guide him to the thing he should do.” Such captivation was easy when mothers could count on a product like Wheaties, which was “as alluring and enticing to a child as a French Confection.”

Sometimes the mother’s responsibility for solicitous manipulation required inventive approaches. Cream of Wheat suggested the use of games as the perfect way to maintain a sense of companionship while manipulating child behavior. Under the headline “Bubbling love of fun—how mothers harness it to guide their youngsters,” one Cream of Wheat ad explained how to “make a game of important habits.” Another tableau in the same series proclaimed triumphantly, “‘Rules ‘n Regulations’ now turned into play.” Each month during the late 1920s Cream of Wheat introduced a new child expert to explain the ways in which parents were now appealing to children’s love of games and of achievement to lead them instead of pushing them in the old way.” Cream of Wheat’s Hot Cereal Breakfast Club offered mothers and children a “jolly plan,” with gold stars, badges, and secrets, to make the hot cereal breakfast habit a “fascinating game.” With such assistance women could remain good mothers, despite the new complexities and standards of proper child care. “Full of fun but scientific, too,” promised Cream of Wheat.
The parable of the Captivated Child, like the other parables, was not simply an invention of the advertising trade. It reflected the intensification of "child-consciousness" of the decade which had gained popular expression in 1926 in the appearance of Parents magazine (initially entitled Children; the parents' magazine). The parables elaborated the idea in its parables, leading psychologists had already prescribed the replacement of traditional discipline with psychological manipulation of the child's natural impulses for its own good. The same sensitivity to the increasing necessity, in a modern environment of complex, bureaucratic institutions, to mold people's behavior and facilitate their "adjustment" by psychological manipulation rather than authoritarian coercion was also finding expression in the 1920s and 1930s in the rising enthusiasm for professional "personnel management" in industry. The parable's emphasis on corporal punishment rather than force coincided with the trend exhibited in the U.S. Children's Bureau bulletin, Infant Care; in the 1914-1921 period it had recommended that infants be forcibly restrained from thumbsucking and masturbation by pinning down or tying their arms, but by 1929 it advised mothers to divert children from such habits by keeping their hands occupied with toys. Martha Wolfenstein, who traced the development of a new American "fun morality" through changes in the successive editions of Infant Care, might have found even more telling evidence of the promulgation of this new ethic in the hundreds of advertising tableaux that reiterated the parable of the Captivated Child.

Advertising parables of the Captivated Child did not simply mirror contemporaneous society. They promulgated a particularly indulgent version of current theories of child guidance and diffused it to a wider audience. And these tableaux provided the constant repetition that gave the new ideas the authority of omnipresence. Although women were probably most influenced by their own upbringing in their style of child care, still the advertisements enabled them to experience vicariously the failures and guilt feelings of mothers who ignored the new ways.

As an advertising tool, the parable of the Captivated Child gave special emphasis to certain aspects of the new child-guidance theories that the manuals and advice books had suggested with far less intensity. For obvious merchandising reasons, the ads advocated parental indulgence with far less qualification than the experts. Sensing that family democracy meant earlier and wider participation in the joys of consumerism, advertisers enthusiastically endorsed the idea of family conferences and shared decision-making. Advertising tableaux surpassed even the child-rearing manuals in placing total responsibility on the parents for every detail of the child's development, thus magnifying the potential for guilt. And they exaggerated the ease with which children might be manipulated. Psychologists occasionally argued that the mother might need to assert her domination in a direct contest of wills with the child, but the advertising parable portrayed a parent-child relationship in which open conflict was always unnecessary. Above all, it encouraged mothers to define their role as that of guarantors of a conflict-free home through their mastery of the new methods and the available products for manipulation.

Guideposts to a Modern "Logic of Living"

The parables of the First Impression, the Democracy of Goods, Civilization Redeemed, and the Captivated Child were only four of many parables in 1920s and 1930s advertising tableaux. Such variants as the parable of the Benighted Drudge and the parable of the Sagacious Child also gained familiarity through frequent retelling. In each case, the parable so succinctly and vividly encapsulated widely accepted ideas that it propelled them back into the society with a more compelling force and a more entrancing ambience. Advertising parables did not challenge the society to overturn conventional ideas, but they did facilitate the spread of those subtle reformulations of old ideas and values endorsed by the most "modern" segment of the population. Frequent repetition of each parable by a number of advertisers gave the pattern of thinking it embodied such an aura of inevitability that fundamentally different points of view became increasingly difficult to imagine. Popularized for a widening audience, the parables acquired the status of social clichés—noths with the quality of "givens" that established the ideological framework within which other ideas would be explored.

Why did advertisers return again and again to the same "great parables"? We know that their measures of feedback were too rudimentary and defective to demonstrate that the audience responded to these particular fables. In the absence of such studies, copywriters fell back upon the expedient that had always served them in their creative decision-making—their own instinctive judgment, biased as it was by the conditions of their own lives. Advertising writers resorted again and again to the great parables and recited them with confidence because they found their lessons validated in their own lives. For instance, in their own careers—shifting and uncertain, constantly dependent upon the success of brief presentations to prospective clients—they had been forced to acknowledge the importance of appearances. What was more, the success of each of their creations, as the trade press constantly reminded them, was dependent on the first impression that it made upon a hurried, inattentive reader. The parable of the First Impression was preeminently a parable for the advertising trade itself.

So, too, in a metaphorical way, was the parable of the Captivated Child. Advertisers employed this parable to align themselves with the most up-to-date literature on child psychology and to pursue good merchandising strategy. But their enthusiasm for it may also have stemmed from the way in which its admonitions to parents resonated with the advice that advertisers regularly exchanged among themselves about how to approach the consumer audience. Readers, they reminded each other, could not be forced or bullied into buying. They had to be tempted, subtly manipulated, given an image of the pleasures and rewards they would gain—in short, captivated. A parable that pointed the way to human betterment and increased pleasure through manipulation was likely to seem axiomatic to a practicing advertising man.
The parables of the Democracy of Goods and Civilization Redeemed also gained authority in the minds of advertising leaders because they served as parables of the function of advertising itself. The Democracy of Goods sought to define social standing in terms of the consumption of specific products rather than by broader measures of wealth or occupational and civic stature. By transferring all significant competition and achievement out of the realm of production and into the realm of consumption, it exalted the process of advertising and distribution as the solution to all problems. The parable of Civilization Redeemed offered a similar therapeutic approach in a way that particularly touched the social experience of advertising agents. Its admonitions about the nervous tension of modern society and the dangers of degenerate softness seemed to diagnose the endemic ills of the advertising profession—insensitivity, the pressure of deadlines, and the temptations of overindulgence in the pleasures of affluent and sophisticated urban living. Yet the parable offered catharsis by promising that these particular ills of civilization—and by implication, all perils arising from modernity—could be cured by advertised products.

Thus, although the great parables were employed on each occasion for a specific merchandising purpose, their cumulative effect was to educate consumers to the modernity epitomized by the advertising agent. In a manner far less radical than the biblical parables, they invited readers to a new "logic of living" in which the older values of discipline, character-building, self-restraint, and production-oriented achievement were subordinated to the newer values of pleasure, external appearance, and achievement through consumption. These were not the parables of a radical gospel, but of an optimistic and mildly therapeutic ministry. Rather than challenging entrenched values and ideas, they brought a modern cast to the American dream by subverting redefining the terms of its fulfillment.

Eventually, the explicit great parables of advertising were to decline as more subtle techniques gained in popularity. Despite their generally uncontroversial messages, advertisers increasingly sought to insinuate their maxims through immediate impression, a style incompatible with argumentative copy. Moreover, the lengthy text common to most advertising parables lost favor as advertisers came to rely increasingly on the illustration to convey the message. The "visual cliché," the topic of the next chapter, steadily came to bear the burden of converting the verbal imagery of the explicit parable into less argumentative, more emotional, iconographic forms.

All of us have seen portrayals of certain scenes so many times that each new version evokes a flash of recognition. These visual clichés include such disparate images as the madonna and child, the dog tugging at the mailman's trousers, or the pop singer embracing a microphone. If the vast majority of traditional folk tales tend to fall into certain categories of "tale types," and if much of popular literature, as John Cawelti argues, follows certain basic formulas, then popular visual imagery may also be susceptible of analysis through identification and interpretation of its persistent patterns or clichés.

The individual mind stores a variety of mental images as well as data in other forms. Exactly what role visual images play in conceptualization remains undetermined, but psychologists characterize visual imagery as the predominant modality for the kind of "thinking" involved in reverie and fantasy. Jerome Singer not only describes the creation of "pictures in the mind's eye" as integral to daydreaming but asserts that daydreaming and fantasizing represent part of the thinking upon which behavior is based. Daydreams, he argues, represent rehearsals and "trial actions" for practical future activity. To the extent that individual daydreams are shaped by an available vocabulary of familiar images, the clichés of popular art of an era, particularly if they are dramatically and repeatedly paraded before the public eye, may induce individuals to recapitulate in their own fantasies some aspects of the shared daydreams of the society. By the 1920s in the United States, advertising had become a prolific producer of visual images with normative overtones, a contributor to the society's shared daydreams.

The "great parables" described in the previous chapter relied heavily on textual argument. Although occasionally enhanced by visual images, they rarely conveyed their moral lessons through illustrations alone. But as the technology for reproducing illustrations expanded, and as the use of color mounted, advertisers increasingly favored pictures over text. Psychologists had regularly advised that pictures could best stimulate the basic emotions. Alfred Poffenberger championed...
AS LONG AS MANKIND USES MOTOR CARS THERE WILL ALWAYS BE A BUICK

8.1, 8.2. More words could hardly evoke the aura of divine approval and the entitlement to popular adulation created by these visual images. Pictures conveyed messages about the product's stature and association, and even unspoken messages about family roles, without inviting debate.

the illustration in his 1925 edition of *Psychology in Advertising* and urged advertisers to "short circuit" the consumer's mind through vivid, pictorial appeals to fundamental emotions. "When the advertisement stimulates thought," he noted, "it stars conflict and competition, instead of releasing a ready-made and predictable response." Arguments invited counterarguments, and assertions might provoke skepticism. But pictures deflected criticism; they inspired belief. Moreover, they could convey several messages simultaneously. As Raymond Firth observes: "The symbol plucks all of the strings of the human heart at once; speech is compelled to take up a single thought at a time." The moral messages of the great parables were sufficiently conventional to be set forward frankly and literally in the text. The potential superiority of the "visual statement" became evident in cases where the advertiser's message would have sounded exaggerated or presumptuous if put into words, or where the advertiser sought to play upon such "inappropriate" emotions as religious awe or a thirst for power. For instance, a copywriter might well have hesitated to advertise a product as just the thing for the man who lusted after power over others. But an illustration with a man standing in a commanding position, perhaps overlooking an impressive urban vista, might convey the same message. Line after line of wordy sentimentality might never touch the reader's heartstrings with the impact of a single misty picture of the family at home. The agency president Earnest Calkins put it bluntly: "A picture . . . can say things that no advertiser could say in words and retain his self-respect." Even at the height of the testimonial craze, no advertiser would have dared to present his product under the headline "God endorses." But a well-placed, radiant beam of light from a mysterious heavenly source might create a virtual halo around the advertised object without provoking the reader into outrage at the advertiser's presumption.

Thus, at a time when the advertising pages were heaping thousands of words of praise on automobiles, and when many agency leaders worried aloud about the undermining of public confidence by this flood of verbal superlatives, *Printers' Ink* noted that the Buick Motor Car Company had transformed its car into a gleaming jewel simply by holding it aloft in an outstretched hand. Buick created a similar aura in a tableau in which an idealized worker-craftsman ascended over city and factory like a modern Apollo, upholding the luminous vehicle for popular worship while displaying a document that ambiguously suggested both manufacturing specifications and a poem of adulation (Fig. 8.1). The United States Rubber Company, without daring to argue that the automobile industry warranted a reverential patriotism, still managed to convey this message by depicting a family watching a parade of ever-improved automobiles go past in the sky against a resplendent background of clouds. The man in the scene gave a military salute while his son raised his arm in tribute (Fig. 8.2).

These particular scenes were not repeated. But other scenes reappeared so often and in such predictable forms in the 1920s and 1930s that they came to qualify as clichés of advertising illustration. Some of these clichés were drawn from other popular media; several were the original contributions of advertising to the
public's fund of familiar images. Whatever their previous dissemination, these cliché images now occupied the advertising pages frequently enough to enter into the nation's visual vocabulary and assume a place within what Clifford Geertz calls "the social history of the imagination." Like materialized daydreams, they sometimes explored fantasies in time and space. Like religious icons, they often purported to symbolize some revealed truth or suggest the presence of a transcendent force. Almost always they conveyed the sense of some ineffable quality in the product or its users that lay beyond the power of mere words to explain.  

1. Master of All He Surveys

No advertising tableaux of the 1920s assumed so stereotyped a pattern as those of the typical man—Mr. Consumer—at work. In hundreds of scenes of manufacturing, delivery, and personal service, workers appeared in a variety of settings with many different props. But the man with whom the reader was expected to identify presented no such confusing diversity of semblances. Again and again, he reappeared in a setting so predictable that it became one of advertising's contributions to the nation's store of visual clichés. In his invariable role as a white-collar businessman, Mr. Consumer—the typical American husband, father, breadwinner, and man-on-the-make—did his work in an office. Almost uniformly, his office contained a large window with a majestic view. His minimal but sufficient props included a telephone, the inevitable window, and a pristine uncluttered desk.

Advertising strategies for particular products might suggest the presence of other men in the office to indicate an executive conference or a meeting with a salesman. Practical considerations might also require the addition of such props as a newspaper, an ashtray, or a photograph of the businessman's wife and child. But the window and the telephone were nearly always gratuitous embellishments. Rarely were they needed as props for the specific message. Rather, their presence stemmed almost entirely from the illustrator's sense of what was fitting to the image of the American man at work. Moreover, advertising strategy rarely determined the extent and content of the view through the office window. Yet, despite their freedom in choice of content, illustrators and agency art directors followed strikingly uniform patterns in depicting office-window vistas in their man-at-the-office tableaux. What assumptions underlay these visual clichés?

Both the telephone and the window-with-a-view symbolized prestige and power. Their combined presence adequately distinguished the executive, even the junior executive, from the mere salesman. The telephone placed the protagonist among those men in the firm whose rank entitled them to an individual extension. The telephone itself, as AT&T ads constantly emphasized, symbolized control, the ability to "multiply" one's personality and issue commands at a distance.

8.3. As "the master of all he surveys," that epitome of the American man, the business executive, commanded an unobstructed view.
In exploring the assumptions behind the illustrators’ “free choice” of these props, I do not mean to imply that windows and telephones were imaginative embellishments of office scenes, unrelated to a contemporary reality. Undoubtedly, most business executives of the era enjoyed these prerogatives. But the persistence with which illustrators adopted an angle of vision which insured that these props would be prominently visible, the care they gave to putting the window exactly in the reader’s line of vision, and the impressive scope and clarity of the view they provided through the window—all these suggest that their motive was not primarily fidelity to reality.

In these tableaux, the window shades were almost never drawn nor the blinds pulled shut. The window never appeared on the “wrong wall” of the office, where the reader could only glimpse its presence. The panorama view through the window was always expansive and usually from a considerable height. It was never obstructed by another skyscraper across the street or only a block away. Even the window panes regularly exceeded the size of those normally used in buildings of the era. This insured the business executive, and incidentally the ad reader, an unobstructed view. Occasionally the walls of the window would disappear altogether to provide the ultimate in expansive views for the businessman. The illustrator of ad executive Earnest Calkins’ Business the Civilizer merely extended this imagery to its logical conclusion in 1928. Displaying an imagination as yet unmatched by architects of the era, he placed the advertising executive, as the archetypal modern businessman, in an office in which walls had given way entirely to a large-paned, ceiling-to-floor, wrap-around window.

The content of the “view from the top” followed patterns almost as rigorously stereotyped as those of the office interior. Two basic motifs predominated. At first, in the early and mid-1920s, the most dominant was the view of the factory.
away from old-fashioned scenes of "the founder" and "the factory." Above all, this visual cliché associated the businessman with control over an independent and autonomous domain. It established the standpoint from which the factory should be seen—the frame established by the window of the nearby, elevated executive office. No tableau that I have encountered in this era adopted an inverted point of view and showed the executive office window as seen from the factory grounds.

In reality, location of the main corporate offices at the factory site and personal supervision of production by the highest executives had already ceased to characterize most large corporations by the 1920s. Gradually, this clichéd scene of the window-on-the-factory must have come to seem archaic, even to artists who lacked the direct experience to make immediate corrections to traditional stereotypes of the business executive at work. By the mid-1920s, a picture of a skyscraper (along with an airplane and a dirigible) had become the artist's shorthand for the concept "modern." Since many corporate offices had moved to urban locations in recognition of the ascendant role of finance, advertising, legal expertise, and centralized communications in their operations, the steady drift toward the skyscraper as the locus of the typical office-with-window scene followed close upon trends in corporate structure.

Here, too, the ads gilded reality. Not all offices could occupy the topmost floors, but those in the advertising tableaux almost invariably gained this vantage. No rival skyscraper obstructed the view from these offices—although several such towers usually were a dozen or more blocks away in order to provide an impressive cityscape. The new businessman of the skyscraper office no longer looked upon a scene of production under his control; neither did he look out upon scenes of consumption. It would have required an awkward angle of vision to encompass the streets below, and shoppers would have been too tiny to be distinct from such a distance. Instead, his window usually disclosed the tops of other skyscrapers and an occasional airplane. The view offered substitute satisfactions for a loss of individual autonomy in an age of business bureaucratization. The "company man," submerged in a large corporate hierarchy, could gaze out of his skyscraper window for compensatory visions of personal mastery. Once in a while, he might look past the fringes of the city to the landscape beyond. The horizon was broader than before; the domain more extensive but less under personal control. It suggested a surveillance of present details than dreams of wider opportunities. In accordance with the enlarged role of planning and scientific research in business operations, the content and scope of the office view now suggested a window on the future (Fig. 8.6).14

Perhaps the infrequent exceptions to these two prominent office-window motifs best clarify the implications of these fantasies of domain. One exception was the business office with no view. Scenes of common office space—scenes of newspaper press rooms, typing and secretarial pools, or the desks of the sales force—do not really qualify here. But occasionally a tableau did appear of a single business office with no view. A few of these were photographs. Perhaps it was difficult to arrange the idealized, clichéd scene for the camera. Real office windows were not normally so large as illustrators liked to draw them; the vistas they afforded were unimpressive or hard to capture with clarity on film. Only with great ingenuity could a photographer capture executive, desk, window, and
external vista with proper lighting. More significantly, in the majority of nonphotographic office scenes without views, the advertising text dealt with failure. In a Byers Pipe ad entitled “Couldn’t the Engineer Foresee This,” the executive confronted a man in overalls in an office with only a blank wall visible. In “Born Tired,” Postum closed the curtains on a caffeine-drugged failure, and in “Wives must share this responsibility,” Post’s Bran Flakes washed out any window or view for the businessman who let down “on the very threshold of success,” giving him no view of factory or city outside. The Monroe Calculating Company did provide its businessmen with a window in “A lot to pay for a needless mistake,” but it denied them any vista by placing another building just beyond the window. The pattern seems clear. Failures did not look out over present or future domains (Figs. 8.7, 8.8).

Another exception was the depiction of a woman working at a desk next to a window with a cityscape vista. I have discovered only two of these; secretaries normally gained such a view only when they were present in an executive’s office taking dictation. Of course, it is not surprising that women, who rarely occupied executive positions, did not enjoy such prerogatives. The secretary or file clerk did not need to exercise a magisterial surveillance over the factory. But the exclusion of women from the opportunity to stand or sit by office windows helped reinforce the notion of an exclusive male prerogative to view broad horizons, to experience a sense of control over large domains, to feel like masters of all they surveyed. (Figs. 8.9, 8.10).

Advertising tableaux rarely provided women with the opportunity to view any vista from on high, to gain a point of vantage from which to see into the future. When women did dream of the future, their vision normally appeared in a thought-cloud above them. In movies, they occasionally looked out of secondstory windows—usually only to spy their lover or husband with another woman in the garden below. In advertisements explicitly evoking a concern about the future, they gained the opportunity to stand hand-in-hand with their husbands, or under their sheltering arms, as the family stared out from a high or uprising into the far distance. But in the advertising tableaux, women never gained the opportunity to look down with that magisterial sense of domain, control, and prospect for the future that the “typical” man obtained from his office window (Fig. 8.11). That difference reaffirmed which of the sexes was truly instrumental in making the world modern, whatever style choices women might make as consumers.

In one occasional variant of the “master of all he surveys” motif, advertising artists developed a visually provocative substitute for the office window. Once again, it excluded failures and women. In this visual cliché, a businessman, or more often several executives, loomed commandingly over a portion of the world miniaturized on a globe, map, or scale model. With giant hands and fingers they pointed to marketing targets, moved replicas of factories from place to place, or placed thumbtacks on cities or railroads. Sometimes they simply gazed intently at the various business options designated on a globe below them. At other times they reached out with huge hands over a scale model with a curvature at the top to indicate a broad segment of the world’s surface. Except for telephone operators, no women in the tableaux ever brought vast areas under similar symbolic control.

The telephone operator, of course, exercised such control only as the instrument of others. A 1929 AT&T advertisement spotlighted those whose power she represented. Six men, one with a telephone, surveyed a map on a conference table.
Two pointed to specific objectives. A globe stood next to the table and maps and graphs covered the walls. Behind them, a window opened on a vista that included a factory chimney with smoke and a skyscraper (Fig. 8.12). Such tableaux ranked with classic images of the enthronement of new elites. Anne Hollander has noted how artists employed the "immense expressive visual power" of draped cloth to convey the dignity and authority of rulers. And Herbert Collins has described how the new "sitting businessmen," the Dutch burghers of the paintings of Hans Holbein and others, were "enthroned" as a new social class through their portraits in impressive chairs, surrounded by the account books, coins, seals, and pens that suggested a world "susceptible to measurement and human manipulation." In comparable fashion, advertising tableaux of the 1920s and 1930s offered powerful new visual images of man, as businessman, upraised to mastery. Telephones, huge fingers pointing to globes, maps, and scale models, and, above all, vistas through lofty office windows, provided the insignia that superseded the rich drapery and bulging ledgers of the past.
II. *Equality and Inequality in Soft Focus*

If the view from the office window defined the dominant fantasy of man’s domain in the world of work, another visual cliché—the family circle—expressed the special qualities of the domain that he shared with his wife and children at home. During the nineteenth century, as a number of historians have pointed out, the notions of work and home had become dichotomized. The home came to represent a sheltered haven to which men escaped to find sanctuary from the harsh world of competition, ambition, and cold calculation. More than ever, the concept of the family circle, with its nuances of closure and intimate bonding, suggested a protective clustering—like the circling of the settlers’ wagons—in defense of qualities utterly distinct from those that prevailed outside.20

This haven, in which men could experience sympathy and tenderness and refresh themselves to rally forth into the harsh “real” world outside, was understood to be another of man’s domains in the sense of his ultimate authority. But the home had also come to be defined as woman’s special domain. It was she who oversaw it throughout the day and imbued it with her singular qualities of softness, emotional warmth, and sacrificial love. She made the home an environment conducive to the molding of good character. Intellectual currents of the early twentieth century suggested that she and the children should exercise a larger degree of equality, at least within this domain and perhaps beyond.21 In advertising tableaux of the family circle, these conflicting claims to governance, predominant influence, and democratic equality were subtly reconciled in visual images. The proposed reconciliations might have seemed far less congenial had they been reduced to explicit verbal formulations.

Like the fantasy of the office window, the fantasy of the family circle was conveyed almost entirely through visual imagery. Only rarely did the accompanying text attempt to further explain the meaning of the tableau. Nuances of medium, style, artistic technique, and composition often contributed as much to the meaning of a given image of the family circle as did explicit content. For instance, advertising illustrations emphasized the polarities between work and home as much through tonal qualities and atmospheric shading as they did through the depiction of the central figures.

The contrast in content was usually explicit enough. Instead of alertly surveying his domain or gauging his ambition by gazing through the office window, the father, at home in the family circle, relaxed in a big chair with his wife perched beside him and his arm around his small son or daughter. But the contrast in atmosphere between work and home was even more dramatic. Instead of confronting the reader in the sharp-edged clarity of outline he had displayed in the austerity of his office, the father now appeared slightly blurred, surrounded by a sentimental haze similar in tonal quality to soft focus in a photograph.

Thus, “soft focus” defined the family circle tableau almost as readily as its specific content. Nostalgic in mood (by contrast, representations of the future in the 1920s and 1930s appeared in sparkling clarity with harsh lines and geometrical patterns), the soft-focus atmosphere suggested harmony and tenderness. It was as though the artist, recognizing the moral ambience of the scene he was invading, deliberately averted the probing, judgmental gaze with which he viewed other vistas. Instead, he washed an affectionate, rosy mist over the scene. It was the family circle, rather than the home itself, that laid claim to the soft-focus treatment. Illustrations of the wife alone, or the wife and her friends in the home, rarely acquired the family-circle haze. They often depicted her efficiency as a consumer and home manager. Such tableaux, while often colorful, were more often glossy than misty. The addition of a child, connoting family, increased the likelihood of a soft-focus treatment. The addition of the father completed the circle, more or less assuring that the scene would fall into one of the sentimentalized categories of leave-taking, homecoming, the sharing of a meal, or evening leisure in the living room. On these occasions, and particularly in the evening scene, soft focus became common (Fig. 8.13).22

Of course advertisers did not limit the soft focus to family-circle tableaux. In other contexts it often represented an effort to imbue some other phenomenon with the emotional and moral qualities of the family circle. One series of tableaux employed the warm, misty atmosphere of the soft focus to contrast the personified intimacy of the locally owned, independent grocery store with the cold impersonality of the externally controlled chain store.23 Procter and Gamble introduced a blurry, soft-focus-with-highlights style for outdoor scenes of mothers, washerwomen, and children during happy washdays. When Arco-Petro Boiler demonstrated how to make the basement into a family “fun room,” this formerly
cold and harsh setting suddenly acquired a soft, hazy, family-circle atmosphere. Although its atmosphere served other uses, the visual cliché of the family circle found its touchstone in the evening scene in the living room. All members of the family appeared in relatively close physical proximity. Father and mother were both present. And while it is difficult to explain exactly how this notion was conveyed, the reader felt assured that all their children were also present. So thoroughly were readers conditioned to accept such scenes as representing the completed family circle that no suspicion was likely to arise that another child might be upstairs or away from home. No toys rested on a section of the floor unoccupied by a child. No unfinished project or opened magazine lay on a table unattended by one of the visible family members. Never did picture or text suggest that other children had gone elsewhere in the house to amuse themselves or that mother and father might be worried about children who had not returned home on time. This was the family unified and intact.

Three variant groupings of family members dominate the family-circle tableaux: (1) father seated with mother and children clustered around him (Fig. 8.14); (2) both mother and father seated in oblique apposition to one another with the children completing a rough circle as they played on the floor (Fig. 8.15); (3) mother and father seated apart, each accompanied by a child (Fig. 8.16). In the latter case, the reader completed the "circle," which was often, more precisely, a kind of triangle. Merchandising strategy sometimes dictated a fourth formula in which the product—a radio, phonograph, room heater, or clock—joined the family circle as the focus of attention, the family forming a complementary semicircle with their backs partly toward the reader. Occasionally the artist made the imagery of the closed circle more explicit by superimposing swirling, concentric lines, a circular border, or an arc of light.

Thus the visual clichés of the family circle stressed harmony, cohesion, and unity. This did not necessarily imply paternal domination. In fact, one variant of the family-circle tableau, the family conference, often advocated, by example, a policy of family democracy. Teenage and pre-teen children sometimes joined the conference, their inclusion depending on whether the advertiser, often a magazine publisher, wished to emphasize the influence of younger readers on family decisions. Sometimes these ads portrayed the policies of the family conference as consumer decisions by ballot, based on the presumption of one person, one vote. Father, apparently, had no alternative when outvoted but to submit to the majority decision. Although the father relinquished any clear claim to sovereignty in consumer decisions, he appeared to do so voluntarily—perhaps even with a bit of condescension. In the more common tableaux of the family circle during evening leisure, he usually retained his stature as the most important and au courant family member. Visual clichés of the family circle reconciled newer notions of family democracy with more traditional images of family governance. They placed the wife and children in less blatantly dependent and deferential postures than they occupied in mid-nineteenth century depictions of the family circle, yet they subtly reaffirmed the father's dominant role.

At least two visual indexes to dominance within the family can be detected in the family-circle tableaux. One of these is possession of the evening newspaper. The prerogative of first or major claim to the newspaper belonged to the family member most informed about important current matters, with whatever modicum of power such knowledge implied. The newspaper reader boasted the best preparation to act on behalf of the family on matters linking it to the outside world. Of the sixty-nine family-circle tableaux I have noted that depict newspaper
reading, thirty-three portray the husband holding exclusive possession of the paper while the wife does handwork, reads a book, tells the children a story, or otherwise busies herself with domestic tasks. Only twice does the wife have sole possession. In twenty-six other instances, the husband sits in a chair with the paper open and his wife looks on while sitting on the arm of the chair or standing behind. Only three times does the wife sit reading the paper while her husband looks on, and in only five cases do both possess separate sections of the paper equally, despite the fact that several of these tableaux stress family readership of a particular newspaper. Wives often read books—both in family-circle scenes and in tableaux of women relieved from drudgery. But book reading suggested the “escapism” of novels or the absorption in “culture” appropriate to the woman’s responsibility for refinement. Possession of the newspaper defined the member of the family with priority to the right to know.27

The typical position of the wife in tableaux in which the newspaper is shared suggests a second significant index to the subtle nuances of dominance and subordination that modified ostensible parity within the family circle. Two positions within the living room scene carry clear implications of subordination because they are frequently occupied by young children. These are the floor and the arm of a chair or sofa. With rare exceptions, neither the wife nor the husband sits or kneels on the floor. Such is not the case with the less humble, but nevertheless subordinate, chair-arm perch so often occupied by children. Out of eighty-eight family-circle tableaux in which only a single chair or sofa seat is occupied, the husband claims the right to the seat in sixty-five. In fifty-one of these instances, the wife perches accommodatingly on the arm of the chair or sofa, usually balancing herself by putting her arm lightly around her husband’s shoulders. In fourteen instances, she stands behind him, diffidently bending or looking over his shoulder.28 Interestingly, in nineteen of the twenty-eight contrary examples, in which the man balances on the arm of his wife’s chair or stands nearby, the tableau advertised either a radio or a phonograph. Apparently, in the presence of culturally uplifting music, the woman more often gained the right of reposed concentration while the (more technologically inclined) man stood prepared to change the records or adjust the radio dials (Fig. 8.17).29

As in the case of the office window, the specific props and configurations of the visual cliche of the family circle derived primarily from the illustrator’s free choice. Specific product strategies might require that a radio or a furnace be present, but these rarely determined the details of spatial arrangement or the nature of other props. In visually conveying the message “family circle,” advertising artists drew upon a folk legacy of conventional images. Occasionally they modified these slightly to enhance the image of equality within the family and thus express the advertisers’ partiality to a broader consumer democracy.

Despite the striking contrasts between the sharp, metallic tone of the office-window tableau and the soft-focus ambiance of the family circle, both constituted fantasies of domain (Fig. 8.18). The narrow domain of the family circle was almost invariably one of harmony. To the woman, the visual cliche of the family
circle served as a reminder of her responsibility to ensure a setting of tranquil, tidy orderliness for the reunification of the family at day's end. To the man, it suggested that he should not survey this domain with the aggrandizing eye of ambition that he cast through the office window, but rather with a benevolent and forbearing regard, one that assumed but did not flaunt his authority.

The visual cliché of the family circle served to reconcile the past and the present, authority and democracy. It defined domain as security rather than as opportunity. Above all, it connoted stability. The products of modern technology, including radios and phonographs, were comfortably accommodated within the hallowed circle. Whatever pressures and complexities modernity might bring, these images implied, the family at home would preserve an undaunted harmony and security. In an age of anxieties about family relationships and centrifugal social forces, this visual cliché was no social mirror; rather, it was a reassuring pictorial convention.

Fantasies of Dimension:
The Future and the Eternal Village

I. Toward the Heavenly City

When father, mother, and child in an advertising tableau stood gazing off into the distance with their backs turned directly or obliquely toward the reader, it could mean only one thing. In the language of visual clichés, they were looking into the future. Perhaps deriving its inspiration from the hallowed image of the American frontiersman, first glimpsing the westward course of empire from the apex of a mountain pass, this visualization of the future objectified the linguistic bias that gave the future a spatial location. It was a place toward which one "faced" because it was "in front" of you. Occasionally, advertising tableaux allowed the nature of the future to remain indistinct. The reader joined the protagonists in gazing toward a blurred line of horizon or a distant, mysterious light. More commonly, the future emerged as a towering and resplendent city (Figs. 8.19, 8.20). In both cases, when characters in the tableau stood facing the future, their faces were bathed in bright light. To move toward the future was to move toward greater illumination.

In a few instances, the city in the distance took the shape of a fantasy city with an eclectic architecture composed of Byzantine, Egyptian, Gothic, and modern forms. But these images, as in the case of Postum Cereal's healthy city of Wellsville, were usually allegories for specific fantasies rather than conceptions of the future. By general consensus, the true image of the future was the skyscraper.
THE WIDENED VISION

N. W. Ayer & Son

8.21. The central vision and goal of America's celebrated founder, N. W. Ayer and Son illustration implied, had been a future crowded with such towering cities as were to be expected at the end of rainbows.

8.22, 8.23. Advertising leaders easily agreed: when Americans from pioneer to modern young businessmen looked toward the future for inspiration, they had invariably glimpsed the skyscrapers of an alabaster city.

With its gleaming white towers forming a single, symmetrical apex, this was the fabled "alabaster city" with machine-tooled edges and a burnished sheen (Figs. 8.22, 8.23). One popular convention, usually employed to visualize the future of an extant city, placed an idealized, skyscraper-dominated image of the present city in the middle distance with another taller, brighter, even more "inspirational" version of the same city rising up from this city into the clouds above. The future was not merely a skyscraper city; it was a super-city that thrust itself into the heavens by using the present city as a base.

More detailed views of the interior of the future city presented an even more stereotyped vision of the cubic urban future. Whereas the distant vision usually viewed the city from a low angle to emphasize its towering height, the internal vision looked sharply downward in order to include streets as well as towers. From this perspective, the visual impact of the freeways nearly equaled that of the skyscrapers. Criss-crossing at two or three levels, these broad, elevated highways often cut through the middle of the skyscrapers at heights ranging from the third to the thirtieth floor. The highways, crossing at exact right angles, contained no ramps or interchanges. The tableaux showed no device by which a car could change direction and move from one freeway level to another. Cars and airplanes often appeared in such city interior scenes, but the viewer rarely caught a glimpse of human figures. When a person did become visible, as did a single master-controller of traffic in a Brunswick Radio ad, he acquired a futuristic
The Equitable looks back 75 years

... and 75 years ahead!

visage that was vaguely "Martian." Here was one way, at least, to translate the fantasy of domain from the present office window into a more centralized, mechanized future (Figs. 8.24, 8.25).

Much of the content of these visual clichés of the future seems quite unremarkable. It is hardly surprising that metropolitan advertising artists, in an age of advancing urbanization, should have depicted the future as a city. Such a vision has been popular even in some rural societies and in eras with very different conceptions of the city. Nor is it surprising that illustrators should have envisioned the city of the future by projecting the current wave of skyscraper construction on a bigger scale. As the famous architectural renderer Hugh Ferriss remarked in 1939, "the most popular image of the Future City...is composed of buildings which, without any modification of their existing nature, have simply grown higher and higher." That the future should appear as a source of light seems unexceptional in a society confident of progress. Seen either from an interior view or from afar, the city of the future connoted prosperity, cleanliness, order, efficiency, and inspiration—conventional values, all.

Equally conventional, but more instructive, was the manner in which such visual clichés of the future left a central problem unresolved. The geometric skyscraper city, seen from outside, presented an awesome spectacle. Its systematized interior conveyed a promise of efficient integration of mass activity. But, with the exception of the single, imperial figure of the traffic controller (an image roughly analogous to that of the advertising man as manipulator and controller of "traffic" in goods and desires), no image appeared that revealed how this awesome, architectonic future city could be made compatible with life on a human scale. In his essay "Psyching out the City," William R. Taylor provocatively describes how American photographers struggled "to recover or re-create human scale" in the "disruptive visual setting" of the modern city. It can hardly be said that the ad creators "struggled" with this problem. Rather, they evaded it. As expert manipulators they simply assumed that such problems could easily be finessed. Pictorially they distracted attention from the issue of human scale with resplendent visions of futuristic cities as symbols of progress. More significantly, they relied on separate, compensating images to retain the purity and simplicity of their vision. They relegated the responsibility for more consoling visual depictions of ongoing life on a coherent, neighborly scale to another visual cliché—that of the "eternal village."

II. The World We Have Saved

Small towns in America did not remain static as the great cities expanded in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. New forms of transportation—canals, then railroads and highways—transformed their physical configurations and their
economic roles. In grain-producing regions, the grain elevator became a common landmark in towns along the railroads. Tides of immigration often brought demographic changes to towns as well as to cities. Many small towns contained a cluster of families from at least one ethnic minority. As they grew modestly in size, some towns gained retail outlets by the 1920s for nationwide gasoline, dry goods, grocery, and drug chains. Many contained small factories, mills, or canneries. Other towns, their function undermined by changes in transportation, disappeared or slumped into a “spirit of decay.” Many Americans concluded that small towns, as a reality, were “finished.”

But the economic transformation of “village America” hardly revitalized the American village as a visual cliché in advertising. Like a lingering ghost-image, the idealized American small town, with its connotations of unity, neighborliness, and comfortable human scale, became a sight more familiar to Americans through the advertising pages than through their direct experience. Few actual American villages of the 1920s and 1930s, with populations between 500 and 1,000 persons, could have seemed other than disjointed, slovenly, and discordant to those whose conception of the small town had been shaped by the advertising tableaux.

In most advertisements, the village appeared as part of the background rather than as the focus of attention. Often it was more than a stylized miniature. Still, it helped evoke an atmosphere and contributed to a conventional perception of the American landscape. Certain stereotyped characteristics can be observed even in the most minute versions of this visual cliché. Almost invariably, the idealized village contained a single spire that towered above the other buildings. In most cases, this spire was identifiable as a church steeple. In other cases it was sufficiently indistinct to have been either a steeple or the spire of a town hall. In nearly every case, the houses of the town were grouped closely together, with the steeple or spire roughly in the center. Almost never did another prominent building appear—except in close-up illustrations of the main street with its bank, general store, and perhaps a gas station and movie theater. Grain elevators, mills, and other evidences of processing or production for export were virtually nonexistent. If a highway entered the town, it usually followed a gently winding course (Figs. 8.26 through 8.29).

These tableaux did not present idealized American villages as nostalgic images of the past. Although often stylized in appearance, these villages purported to represent part of the current landscape that consumers would experience while using the batteries, motor oils, tires, auto accessories, soaps, telephones, and other products featured in the ads. As they viewed repeated images of these pristine eternal villages, readers could find assurance that, despite the advance of awesome and impersonal skyscraper cities, their society still retained the qualities suggested by “village America.”

The dominating steeple of the eternal village served both to symbolize a spiritual unity and to establish a comprehensible standard of physical scale. The single church (no village tableaux hinted at internal differences by depicting more than one church) suggested social harmony and the supremacy of higher, spiritual values. The clustering of houses around this focal point reinforced the image of unity and harmony. Huddled together, they implied neighborliness and demographic homogeneity. Although no inhabitant of the village could gain a sense
of hegemony by gazing down from some skyscraper window, still all residents, the tableaux implied, could shape their own destinies and enjoy congenial personal interaction with their neighbors on a warm, human scale. Advertising's eternal villages were invariably neat and trim, never decaying or funky. Nothing in the tableaux suggested that people were regularly leaving such towns for opportunities elsewhere, or that any reason existed why someone should wish to leave.

Whether advertising illustrators recognized that such eternal villages contained as much fantasy as their visions of futuristic cities is difficult to assess. Occasionally stylized images of the small town appeared in tableaux with equally stylized skyscraper cities, the contrasting visual clichés symbolizing the society's urban-rural spectrum (see Fig. 8.6). E. R. Squibb and Sons employed these complementary images on an immense lighted sign that dominated the nation's most prominent advertising marquee—Times Square. A radiant sun, which was gradually transformed into the Squibb logo, arose from a body of blue water. Flanking the logo stood two glowing images, which together represented the entire nation—a "towering city" on one side and "a country village, with its cottages, trees, and a church steeple" on the other. In such contrasts, village and city were equally idealized and stylized.

In other contexts, advertisers distinguished between the clichéd image of the eternal village and various actual small towns. In an Aluminum Company of America ad, which described how "smiling towns" could surpass their dingier neighbors through "the transforming power of aluminum paint," the idealized drawing of the archetypal "smiling town" at the top stood in pristine contrast to the less romanticized examples of application of aluminum paint to lamp poles, water towers, and bridges in the pictures below. More striking, in their divergence from the eternal-village image of the American small town, were the photographs of actual small towns in the advertisements by Grit magazine. Boasting of Grit's coverage of such flourishing small towns as Basset, Virginia, and Mount Jewett, Pennsylvania, these ads employed photographs that bore little resemblance to the conventional advertising image of the American village. The photographs showed bustling downtown shopping districts, parking lots, and factories. Not a single church steeple was to be seen (Fig. 8.30).

But advertising illustrators ignored such glimpses of "real" small towns when called upon to depict rural landscapes. The villages in most advertising tableaux looked the way people wanted them to look—or at least the way advertisers assumed they should look. Such eternal villages assured readers that the qualities of life on a human scale were not lost in the midst of a "progress" symbolized by skyscrapers and elevated freeways. Could such assurances really make the depersonalized images of the city of the future more readily acceptable? All we can say for sure is that such visual clichés allowed readers to contemplate separately two idyllic settings that could not have been convincingly fused into a single image: the cold efficiency of the city of the future and the warm neighborhood of the eternal village.

Through compartmentalization, these visual clichés embraced and reinforced a popular ambition to gain the best of both worlds. One could more comfortably enjoy visions of a future amidst the thrilling towers and intricate networks of a
dazzling but uncompromising city if one could be sure that there were still
neighborly villages to which one might occasionally retire, physically or
psychologically, to regain contact with the sentimental side of life. Like the polarity
of office and home, the implicitly complementary clichés of eternal village and
skyscraper city encouraged a faith in the possibilities of progress without cost
through broader, but highly segmented, lives. In subsequent decades, despite the
growth of suburbia, Americans would not find it easy, or even entirely satisfying,
to compartmentalize their lives in the quest for painless progress in the way that
such scenarios seemed to envision.

Visual Clichés as Icons

At a certain point, almost impossible to define with precision, some of
the visual clichés of the advertising pages acquired a liturgical dimension. Adver-
tising, of course, did not deal with the conventional objects of religious worship.
Advertisements were secular sermons, exhortations to seek fulfillment through
the consumption of material goods and mundane services. Agency men warned their
colleagues not to quote the Bible or otherwise invoke religious controversy. Re-
ligious figures, including Jesus, Mary, the apostles, saints, and even contem-
porary ministers, almost never appeared in advertisements. One might conclude
that advertisers had accepted a doctrine of two distinct spheres—the material
and the spiritual—and had resolved to confine themselves to "the things that are
Caesar's."

But the silence of advertising on matters of religion did not entail so absolute
a distinction between material and spiritual realms as might be imagined. By
deciding to compare the worth of their products with the worth of spiritual
objectives, advertisers found themselves free to employ their fullest talents for
 glorification without incurring charges of idolatry. If an advertisement paid effi-
nent homage to a door hinge or tube of toothpaste, it did not preclude the
possibility, at least in theory, that an even higher pitch of adulation might be
found for religious devotions. Leo Spitzer, the noted literary scholar, once sug-
gested that popular convention permitted advertisers to exaggerate, as if all their
statements were placed within qualifying "quotation marks." These invisible
quotes—tacitly understood to exist by both advertiser and reader—said, in effect:
We both know that the nature of advertising requires this statement to be exag-
gerrated beyond all reasonable measure; therefore we both recognize that it must be
discounted to some degree, and that the words and images glorifying the product
are not to be taken quite at face value. With such quotation marks implicitly
understood, products could virtually be defied in the "poetic" and "playful"
language of advertisements without suggesting that they competed with religious
figures as objects of devotion.

Advertising leaders knew, however, that some Americans still worried that the
goods extolled by advertising did compete against "higher goods" in seeking to tap
a finite reservoir of public adulation. A few expressed fears that the booming voice
of advertising would drown out spiritual appeals. Copywriters generally re-
spected certain boundaries of the spiritual realm by declining to use words such
as "worship," "pray," "bless," "revere," "bow down to," or even "adore" to
describe the attitude the consumer should take toward the product. But illustra-
tions did not observe such limits, and their subtext in inducing a reverent or
sacred attitude from the reader made it harder to discount their appeal to the proper
degree. Such images as the family circle and the city of the future certainly invited
attitudes of veneration or awe from the viewer. Several other visual clichés made
products into virtual idols, creating a secular iconography for the age.

In her provocative essay "Advertising—Sacred and Profane," Marghanita Laski
explains why it was virtually inevitable that advertisers would gravitate toward
depictions of the product as idol. By asking in what context people typically find
advertising offensive, she identifies a group of "numinous" situations and events
that trigger "life-enhancing feelings" or "a passion of awe." (Rudolph Otto, in his
study of the phenomenology of religion, first proposed the term "numinous" to
characterize the irrational elements of awe-inspiring "majesty," transporting
"ravishment," and a sense of "absolute overpoweringness" in religious apprehen-
sion.) According to Laski, the realm of the "numinous" includes religion, royalty,
ar, education, national glory, natural beauty, love and marriage, childbirth, and
childhood—all "sacred spheres" in which advertising is often seen as an incongru-
ous and obnoxious intrusion. Yet advertisers, she points out, although wary of
the negative reactions they might provoke by invading such numinous realms,
still recognize that people yearn to experience moments of enhancement, awe, and
rapture. Given the power of such noncommercial aspirations, Laski notes, few
advertisers will restrict themselves to appeals that belong only to the sphere of the
marketplace. Not only do consumers want to believe that material goods will
bring them transcendental, non-material satisfactions, but advertising men wish to
see themselves as "creative men delivering not only the goods but the Goods."

Advertisers, then, faced the strategic problem of identifying their product with
life-enhancing moments without a blatant obtrusiveness that would destroy the
quality of numinosity. To quote "Be patriotic; buy my product," or "Experience
the sublime rapture of owning a product illuminated by God's holy light; send
your money today," would embarrass any respectable advertiser. But visual
clichés that employed vague forms of sacred symbolism rather than specific
religious figures, icons, and relics might subtly infect the product with num-
inosity. Such visual strategies sought to transform the product, in Laski's phrase,
into a "surrogate trigger" for producing those life-enhancing feelings that con-
sumers avidly pursued. As an ad in Printers' Ink Monthly offhandedly noted in
1926, advertisements were "beginning to occupy the place in inspiration that
religion did several hundred years ago."

I. Heroic Proportions

Some of the visual clichés that contributed to the numinosity of products were
blatantly obvious. Many advertisers attempted to awe viewers with pure mag-
nitude. Huge refrigerators towered above tiny towns of consumers; silhouetted
against the starry sky, they stood guard over communities like giant sentinels.
Immense cars straddled the rivers and towns of miniaturized countrysides below,
symbolizing the command over the landscape obtainable through the automobile. Huge newspapers and magazines in the sky reflected illumination on cities and crowds below (Figs. 8.31, 8.32). Tide described the fictitious salon that appeared frequently as the backdrop for automobile ads as dwarfing Madison Square Garden “to insignificance.” Next to this “super showroom” of the tableaux, it observed, “many a stately cathedral would lose grandeur.” (See Fig. 10.2.) In what one commentator described as a “burning in” campaign, the Goodyear Rubber Company erected its name in immense block letters on majestic mesas and mountains in the hope of imprinting this image indelibly on the reader’s mind. In other ads, gigantic tires and batteries floated in the sky; colossal tubes of toothpaste and cans of car polish dwarfed their surroundings.

No one expected consumers to be deceived by such images. The incongruous size of the product served to arrest the attention of the viewer who, knowing its real size, would make a substantial discount. But some advertising writers suggested that the “heroic-proportions” technique might earn the product an enhanced stature despite the viewer discount. To place a battery box in the sky above a busy metropolis and to surround it with miniature scenes, one commentator noted, “is to give great importance to a commonplace device.” Another critic of advertising art pointed out that the “kolossals” image was not only “almost overpowering in its demand upon reader attention” but also commanded “confidence and respect.” Such an illustration, he continued, “figuratively batters down mental resistance by the sheer physical attributes of size, mass, bulk, and specific gravity.” Rosalind Williams has recently characterized such tactics as an “esthetic of the primitive.” Sympathizing with critics of ultramodern lighting displays in the auto salons of late nineteenth-century Paris, she observes that the “sheer disproportion of scale” in commercial displays served to display raw power and to “stun the spectator into a passive, confused stupor so that he is only able to look, look, look.” Although “bigger-than-life” images in twentieth-century print advertisements lacked that degree of power and were undoubtedly discounted by readers as obvious visual puffery, they still conveyed impressions of the product as dominant or transcendent, if not awesome.

II. Adoring Throngs

Advertising illustrators frequently introduced tiny human figures into the heroic-proportions displays in order to emphasize the awesome magnitude of the product. These dwarfed human figures served another purpose as well. They were the advertiser’s shills, conveying by their demeanor a model for the appropriate attitude toward the product. A single individual would have been sufficient to establish the scale of proportion, but such illustrations often depicted large crowds swarming around the product or gazing up to it in a worshipful posture. These “adoring throngs” manifested the manufacturer’s fantasy of public response to his product and sought to sway consumers through a bandwagon appeal. Advertising agents must also have recognized the bewitching auxiliary effect of such illustrations on their clients’ egos (Fig. 8.33).
masses through special effort. Recognizing, empathetically, a rising public fear of submergence in mass conformity (partly induced by their own successes in mass merchandising), advertisers frequently appealed to this concern by advertising products on the strength of their capacity to lift the individual out of the crowd (Fig. 8.14). Significantly, visual depictions of the individual emerging out of the crowd never featured women.

There are no massers, Raymond Williams reminds us; "there are only ways of seeing people as masses." Movie directors, beginning with D. W. Griffith, had given the public striking visions of the masses in motion—as festive celebrants in sacred and secular rituals, as dangerous agents of mass violence, as armies on the march, and as boisterous throngs in the marketplace. The poet Vachel Lindsay celebrated the "crowd splendor" of such whirring, handkerchief-waving, "sea of humanity" scenes as the major artistic and emotional triumph of early filmmaking. But the "splendor" of crowds in advertisements was less turbulent and more statistical. Advertising crowds were passive and orderly. Often motionless, they occasionally moved in a trance toward the product-icon. These were well-dressed crowds—docile, respectful, even worshipful in demeanor. One senses their readiness to defer to leadership, to accept any proffered authority. The individual figures in these mobs were so tiny that readers were not invited to see themselves as members of the undifferentiated conforming throng. But they were expected to internalize the crowd’s obvious sense of awe for the "bigger-than-life" product. In this depicting the adoring throngs, advertisers expressed their fondest wishes for consumer pliability and sublimated their contempt for conformity and their fears of inundation by the mob.

Visual clichés of heroic proportions and adoring throngs represented elementary visual ways of conveying ideas that would have sounded ridiculous or authoritarian if stated verbally. Neither of these visual clichés has been entirely abandoned by advertisers, as evidenced by Jonathan Price’s recent account of the troubles encountered in producing a television commercial based on "the idea of putting a five-story box of detergent out on an open plain, to be worshipped by hundreds of people." But the massive crowds of tiny, undifferentiated figures paying homage to the heroically scaled product have appeared only infrequently since the early 1930s. This visual cliché may have faded as advertising leaders came to associate such images with totalitarian regimes or sensed that their audience was becoming increasingly fearful of the specter of conformity. Its decline may also have reflected the preference of advertisers for another visual cliché that offered a more individualized model for consumer behavior in the presence of the product.

III. In Its Presence

Within a single decade, beginning about 1920, one visual image became familiar to nearly all Americans through the efforts of advertising alone. This was the tableau of the small group clustered reverentially around the open door of the new refrigerator. In their symbolic power and their zeal to inspire reverence in the viewer, the clichéd refrigerator tableaux generated a pattern of secular iconography.
All the mechanism is in here

It is all in a single hermetically-sealed casing made with a metal... don't let machinery stand in the way of

"..."You will notice that the back of the...

The General Electric Refrigerator is an important element in the home's economy. It is the heart of the kitchen, the source of the family's safety.

With this arrangement, no heat is lost in the refrigerator. It all goes down. That is because every component of the refrigerator is made with the utmost care and precision. Each part is engineered to work together perfectly, ensuring that no heat escapes. This is why the General Electric Refrigerator is so efficient and reliable.

Refrigerator

GENERAL ELECTRIC

8.35. Even in the appliance store the electric refrigerator, as modern cornucopia, came amply supplied with food. Since the door did not hold food, it could be very narrow. Compare Fig. 8.37.

Several qualities of the electric refrigerator made it particularly eligible for the role of secular icon. As a protector of health through the prevention of spoilage, it served as the benevolent guardian of the family's safety. As the immediate source of a great variety of life-sustaining foods, it acquired the image of a modern cornucopia. No open refrigerator door in an advertising tableau ever disclosed a spare supply of food. The gleaming white of the exterior suggested cleanliness and purity. And its size was sufficient to require a seated person (and the advertising illustrator) to view it at a slightly upward angle. Small wonder that the faces of the typical housewife and her friends in the advertising tableaux took on a rapturous glow when they beheld it, or that they chose to while away many an hour in the security of its presence.

And this here

my good woman, is the Monitor Top

The what? The MONITOR TOP modern... the General Electric Monitor Top...

8.36. Did General Electric intend to mimic its earlier ad—or had the visual cliché simply frozen the artistic imagination? Note the high heels of the young initiates into the role of enthroned consumer.

The visual cliché of the entrancing refrigerator appeared in several variations. Two of these predominated. In one, the salesman demonstrated the product while a young married couple one or two women looked intently on. Often the women were seated like attentive students directly in front of the refrigerator. So cliché did this scene become that the General Electric Company could effectively embellish it with a humanized touch (Figs. 8.35, 8.36). In the other major variant, the wife or married couple brought guests to the kitchen to admire the new acquisition. Convention dictated that in such tableaux no adult except the salesman could gaze in a direction other than at the icon itself. Convention also prohibited a husband from appearing in the company of a refrigerator without the presence of his wife. (An alien anthropologist might have identified this feature
as evidence of a cultural taboo.) Both men and women observed fastidious standards of dress in its presence (Fig. 8.37). Sometimes the expressions on the faces of the women suggested that they had glimpsed through the opened refrigerator door a secular revelation as spellbinding as any religious vision.

Such moments of secular epiphany were not confined to visions induced by refrigerator-icons. Other products could evoke similar reverence. The announcement of the model 725 Hoover vacuum cleaner, for instance, disclosed the “finest portable electric cleaning machine ever made” on a small, raised platform around which four well-dressed women clustered in worshiping postures (Fig. 8.38). Few representations of the Christ child ever depicted a more rapt or focused attention by the assembled worshipers. The new Hoover lacked only a nimbus to complete the divine aura. Other Hoover ads revealed the same transfixed gazes on the part of husbands and wives who were prospective owners, the woman’s expression being, as usual, the most suggestive of religious ecstasy.  

It is unlikely that advertising illustrators, even when they created such tableaux as that of the communicants of the “new Hoover,” saw themselves as appropriating religious imagery. Modern society saw little heresy in the most fervent adulation of the works of technological progress. Yet one doubts if copywriters could unabashedly have translated such scenes into comparable verbal expressions of awe and reverence. And one can imagine the quandary facing any artist required to search for postures and facial expressions that would convey a true religious ecstasy, something far surpassing the exaltation these consumers showed in the presence of a refrigerator or vacuum cleaner. Without directly competing with religion, advertising had appropriated the imagery of the sublime.

The detailed portrayal of exemplary facial expressions and body language in the product’s presence, by figures who were simultaneously reader surrogates and advertisers’ skills, clearly constituted an improvement over the “adoring throng” in effective advertising imagery. At its best, the adoring throng remained an
abstraction. It was merely the visual equivalent of a numerical generalization about the millions who were devotedly choosing the product. The "in its presence" tableau, however, personalized the proper attitude toward the product. By linking devotional imagery with the human-interest technique and the prescription to "show the results in the consumer's life," they encouraged viewers to identify with other "typical" men and women who were obviously entranced by the presence of the product. In these invitations to technological idolatry, no disturbing distinctions marked off the realm of the sacred from that of the profane.

IV. Holy Days, Poignant Moments

Readers of the July 1926 issue of the American Magazine encountered a unique injection for a cigarette ad. The scene portrayed a colorful hometown holiday crowd of adults and children as they watched a fire and drum corps lead a Fourth of July parade. As the parade made its way down the tree-shaded streets of a small town or suburban neighborhood, the ad's headline encouraged readers to join in the spirit of the occasion: "When Fourth of July bands are playing—and the cannon are roaring out their celebration of another day of Independence and Freedom—have a Camel." As the main text of the ad unfolded, Camel explained the less-than-self-evident connection. When readers thought about freedom, they should have a Camel. "For no other cigarette ever brought such liberation to so many millions of smokers. On the day of its birth, Camel decreed the end of the taint taste, of cigarette after-taste." Both the Fourth of July and Camel cigarettes symbolized freedom.62

Such were the tortuous associations often inspired by the advertisers' pursuit of the ominous. They neglected few chances to associate their products with the life-enhancing feelings already engendered in their audiences by holiday celebrations and historical symbols. Advertisers ran risk of offense in appropriating political symbols than in employing explicitly religious imagery. But the lack of a visual cliché that effectively fused the product with the grandeur of the occasion could place an almost impossible burden on the attempts. To achieve ominous association through verbal explanations, as in the Camel ad, usually seemed awkward and forced. Still, the attraction of linking the product with "the finer feelings of the human heart" led the National Confectioners Association to proclaim October 8 as Sweetest Day—a day when each person could escape the rush and complexity of modern life and release the "little, lonely Cinderella lurking in the heart of every one of us who is gladdened by acts of kindness." A gift of candy, the Association noted in an apparent afterthought, was the epitome of such an act.63

In a number of instances, advertisers found it possible to appropriate an already secularized visual imagery that still evoked the ominous aura of communal celebrations. The religious solemnity of Christmas and Thanksgiving, in particular, might be tapped through symbols that could be employed commercially with little danger of offense. An ad in the 1931 Thanksgiving issue of Saturday Evening Post, for instance, offered readers a warm scene of a family Thanksgiving dinner with the pointed reminder that Camel cigarettes were "something to be thankful for." Sentimental scenes of family homecomings in the country, the family trimming the Christmas tree, or the extended family around the holiday feast had predated the new advertising; but advertisements were responsible for some touching twentieth-century renderings.64 Santa Claus served so admirably as an advertising character that one trade-press critic expressed grave concern in the mid-1930s that he was being devalued by indiscriminate use. So common was the Santa Claus testimonial, in which Santa "endorsed" the product by using it in the advertising tableau, that the whole moral authority of Christmas might collapse as children caught glimpses of this "supreme arbiter of their rights and wrongs" riding his convertible at excessive speeds on behalf of high-octane gasoline, smoking a Lucky Strike, stealing a kiss "from a ravishing Old Gold Maiden," or gulping down "a straight slug of Old Drum blended Whiskey."65

Several advertisers recognized that in addition to times of traditional celebration, other poignant moments might provide effective visual clichés to convey ominous associations. A Listerine ad employed the powerful image of mother and children during bedtime prayers, with the small Listerine bottle inescapably visible in the medicine chest of the adjoining bathroom (Fig. 8.39).66 Camel cigarettes insinuated themselves into those moments of communal bliss "when friends come in to share the warmth of your fire and your friendship," and the Curtiss Candy Company arranged the presence of Baby Ruth bars at a lover's tryst "on a winter's evening when lights are low" (Fig. 8.40). At such moments,
the company explained to viewers who read beyond the romantic visual cliché, Baby Ruth inspired dreams that made "a cozy cottage seem the most desirable of fairy castles." A Printers' Ink columnist described an ad for the "powdered brilliancy" of new inside-frost electric lamps in which two lovers basked in the moonlight of an enchanted garden. The scene, he noted, had the effect of "surrounding ... industrial subjects with a shimmering halo."

In these sublime moments, as in the holiday scenes, advertising tableaux appropriated established visual clichés. Through advertising, such scenes became a more memorable part of the society's fund of visual images. In mellow four-colored reproductions, they often attained new evocative power. Products thus found their way into the secular iconography of communal celebration and romantic love.

V. Radiant Beams

The iconic visual clichés popularized by advertising illustrations were not all as obvious as the heroic-proportions tableaux or as derivative as the tableaux of sublime moments. Attempts to instill a "passion of awe" toward the product through numerous associations worked best when the imagery was abstract and when it was susceptible of both religious and secular interpretation. In such cases, the clichéd visual image could work its associative magic without the awkwardness of labored analogies or abrasive intrusions. A popular visual cliché of this type was the simple beam of light.

During the 1920s and 1930s, powerful beams of light steadily criss-crossed the advertising pages (Figs. 8.41 through 8.44). Often they streamed in from undisclosed sources, above and to either side, to spotlight the product. Some beams radiated outward from the product itself: A number of beams tapered to brilliant points; others broadened like searchlight rays. Several beams of light frequently intersected—often at the point where each illuminated the product, but sometimes randomly in mid-air. Beams of light entered rooms from directions in which no window was visible; powerful sunbeams simultaneously flooded buildings from opposite sides. Beams created sharply etched geometric patterns; they also diffused into misty aureoles of light around the product. Some took on that special radiance of a beam that has passed through a cathedral's stained-glass window (Fig. 8.45).

Where did these beams come from? What did they signify? Since they often originated from sources beyond the border of the illustration, the viewer might unconsciously or inattentively assume various possibilities. One likely source was the sun. Another was some artificial source—a spotlight or searchlight. A purely figurative source was also possible, since the scenes themselves were sometimes more figurative than literal. For obvious reasons, this source was never portrayed visually or identified in the text. But sometimes the pervasiveness of the beams, their unnatural power, and their simultaneous points of origin in several undisclosed regions of the heavens clearly implied (but never argued) that they represented the holy light of God's favor.
Were art directors conscious of employing religious symbolism in their use of radiant beams to evoke numinous feelings? Probably not. The subtly evocative power of the beam of light stemmed from the fact that it had become a secularized image without entirely losing its spiritual overtones. From one perspective, light beams in an advertising tableau might simply illustrate the sunbeam, a common natural phenomenon. Yet the way in which unnaturally distinct and powerful beams were drawn directly to the product, often illuminating a single car to the exclusion of the surrounding landscape or a single house in an otherwise overcast city, suggested a sun guided by moral considerations. Whatever the illustrator’s conscious intentions, such distinctive beams seemed to signify celestial favor. Some light beams appeared to come from such melodramatic, yet unhallowed, sources as spotlights and searchlights. But these beams often fell upon objects that attracted other shafts of light from the heavens. Pictorial convention suggested that products capable of attracting the public favor symbolized by such secular beams must warrant attention from undisclosed heavenly sources as well.

Trade-journal discussions of these ubiquitous rays of light focused almost entirely on the issue of dramatic effect. Spotlighting the product through the “artifices of light and shadow” enhanced the importance of the product and focused the reader’s attention. Small and commonplace products, such as the belt-buckle that barely peeked out from beneath a man’s jacket, desperately needed dramatization. A beam of light could do this far more impressively yet unobtrusively than the old-fashioned, superimposed pointing finger. Some advertisers used the beam of light simply as a visual substitute for the headline “Announcing.” For others, it served as an element of design that conveyed an aura of modernity. One critic, exasperated with the imitativeness of modernistic advertising artists, reported that the only answer he received when he asked one artist “why he ran a handful of those radiant sun-explosive lines the way he did” was: “All right, then let’s run them some other way.” The radiant beam had become an unconscious, clichéd element in a variety of advertising tableaux. If asked to justify these conventional beams, advertising artists were most likely to cite their “vitalizing” effects.

Thus advertising artists, if they gave any thought at all to this common visual cliché, considered it from a pragmatic standpoint. We should not read too much symbolic significance into a conventionalized image that had lost its original “meaning” and served merely to direct attention or elaborate a design. Still, the power of such beams to enhance products and provide drama stemmed in part from the more sublime harmonics with which they still resonated. Powerful beams of light had long represented divine force or influence; they had translated human “enlightenment” into pictorial form. Anne Hollander notes how seventeenth-century painters working in the style of Caravaggio employed beams of light instead of the traditional drapery to create awe-inspiring settings. Elizabeth Kendall, in a description of an early twentieth-century Ted Shawn “sermon” in dance form, reveals how Shawn could “employ a powerful beam of light from a hidden source off-stage in full confidence that the audience would immediately accept it as a symbol of the sublime. Shawn first interpreted a tortured soul. Then, “from the wings came a white light such as was used through the dramatization of Ben Hur; Shawn pulled himself to his feet, inflated his chest.
8.46. The instinct to link skyscrapers with illumination and public beneficence found expression in the powerful beams that occasionally emanated from skyscraper windows.

and, set free from ignorance, walked off the stage into the heart of the hidden calcium [spotlight]. The evocative, dramatic power of radiant beams did not arise merely from the physical impact of sharp contrasts of light and shadow on the viewer's cone; it arose also from the suggestive, symbolic quality of the powerful beam of light, particularly when the source was hidden.

When they did not spotlight the product, radiant beams appeared most frequently in the company of one of the other secular icons of the age—the skyscraper. The vertical sweep and gleaming crowns of the new skyscrapers dominated the urban eye. Photographers in the 1920s paid them constant homage. Conveying a sense of both majesty and aspiration, the skyscraper seemed a vivid testimony to the power of man to manufacture the sublime. To characterize them as "cathedrals of commerce" was to express a perfectly proper reverence. In the cliché images of the city in the distance, these skyscrapers merged to form a crowning central apex. Their pinnacles often evoked a vision of the distant city as castle, a blending of modern aspirations with fairy-tale visions of the happy ending.

The addition of radiant beams in crossing, angular lines dynamically complemented the skyscrapers' abrupt and staccato verticality. To the skyscraper's suggestion of man's domination, beams of light added the image of man's power to dispel darkness. And, while beams from within the city itself reflected man's power of illumination, rays of light from the heavens suggested that God and Nature approved the splendor of the scene below. In the visual clichés, this powerful conjunction of symbols found its crowning expression in radiant beams that traced their source to skyscraper windows. These beams equaled the power of those from the sky and those rising from ground level, presumably from searchlights. Only gigantic searchlights, mounted in the upper-story windows of these skyscrapers, could, in actuality, have produced beams of such intensity. Employed in this way, the beams gave testimony to the immense, benevolent power of the skyscraper and the business acumen and technological advances it represented. Skyscrapers possessed a celestial glow that radiated beams of great illuminating power (Fig. 8.46).

Advertising leaders had an insatiable appetite for such images. Skyscrapers with radiant beams appeared even more frequently in trade-journal ads and illustrations than in the popular media. Denizens of skyscrapers themselves, advertising agents unsurprisingly found satisfaction in this sublime image of the business civilization they were helping to erect. They assumed that consumers would also find the skyscraper a compelling image of progress and modernity. On some occasions they even found it possible to combine the radiant beam or the skyscraper, or both, with the adoring throng. Advertising men who had often worked late in these urban towers, or modest versions of them, may insensibly have enshrined themselves in such images. They, too, like the skyscrapers and the midnight beams, were firing the imagination of the American people.

If radiant beams carried a spiritual suggestiveness that consecrated skyscrapers, enthralled crowds, and transformed mundane products into secular idols, two variations of the radiant beam cliché carried even stronger religious overtones. In one of these, the beams radiated from the product itself. Such a phenomenon constituted a reasonable effort at literal rendition in the case of a light bulb. But it could only suggest some mysterious inner radiance in the case of automobiles, toothpaste tubes, sewing machines, or garbage cans (Figs. 8.47, 8.48). In the other variation, beams from above or within the product created a hazy glow of
light around the product that mimicked the traditional nimbus around the head of Jesus, the Madonna, or the saints (Fig. 8.49). So far as I know, no advertising agency was ever accused of idolatry for putting the nimbus to profane purposes. But the acquisition of such "outward and visible signs of an inward and spiritual grace" represented a final step in the successful, though largely unconscious, adaptation of religious imagery to the advertising tableaux, the modern icons of a faith in mass consumption.

The relative power of such visual clichés to evoke numinous associations becomes apparent when we compare them with the awkward efforts of advertising texts. When one toilet-seat manufacturer called his product "The Seat of Eternal

Whiteness," he was seeking to create the nimbus effect. But words invited the kind of snide reaction that a busy halo of light did not. Similarly, words alone seemed inadequate to explain convincingly the contribution of Canada Dry Ginger Ale to "the soul and spirit of man." Radiant beams probably enhanced the products of the McKinney Manufacturing Company with less likelihood of arousing skepticism than its advertising proclamation that "Hinges are no longer 'just hardware', . . . [but] the jewelry of the home" (Fig. 8.50). It was a testimony to the efficacy of the visual cliché that you simply could not put into words the same message, with all its nuances and associations, without sounding pompous, ridiculous, or just plain idolatrous. From 1926 to the middle
of the next decade, writers in the advertising trade press regularly expressed alarm that advertising was courting public disbelief through exaggeration and "super-advertising." Incessantly, they warned against verbal superlatives and the attribution of vague, undemonstrable qualities to the product. But only three times in all those jeremiads have I discovered concerns about public responses to any of the iconic visual clichés: one critic worried about repetitious visual images, and two expressed concern about the overuse of the heroic-portraits cliché as a mental battering ram. 85

Thus the visual clichés, through frequent repetition, became one of the most pervasive and least questioned contributions of advertising to the popular fund of images. That the family, the small town, or the future were understood to "look" a certain way did not insure that life would come to imitate popular art. On the contrary, the actual phenomena often changed while the picture remained the same. But the visual clichés helped establish the conceptual, and sometimes the moral, reference points in relation to which all changes brought about by the vicissitudes of modernity would be evaluated.

To the extent that they attained the numinosity of "sacred symbols," the visual clichés of advertising acquired what cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz describes as the "peculiar power . . . to identify fact with value at the most fundamental level." In so doing, they pushed forward the process, described by Jackson Lears as already well advanced in the late nineteenth century, of appropriating traditional symbols for modern ends. The cultural impact was reciprocal. Products gained temporary enhancement, but traditional symbols were "trivialized." 86 And the process has continued, so that now, in our own time, it seems inconceivable that traditional and sacred symbols can be further impoverished. After the emergence of modern American advertising, as we now realize, there remained few ways of picturing religious inspiration that did not resemble some insurance tableau, nor could individuals easily daydream about poignant moments without recalling visual clichés from some coffee commercial or cigarette ad.

"Every advertisement is an advertisement for success." Thus spake "And Consumer," typical American, created by the humor magazine Life in 1925 in an effort to win the goodwill of advertisers and their ad agencies. In his folksy way Andy set forth a doctrine of the benefits of advertising to the common man: "Looking at the advertisements makes me think I've got to succeed," he confesses; "I guess one reason there is so much success in America is because there is so much advertising," he philosophized. 87

Certainly advertising in the 1920s had incorporated Andy's creed in ways that went beyond his theory of ads as goads to success. Explicit formulas for success and the promise of progress without cost had permeated many of that decade's most persistent social parables and visual clichés. The Great Depression of the early 1930s, however, presented the American dream of individual success through equal access to ample opportunities with its most formidable challenge. Not only had advertising writers served as public spokesmen for a business system now brought under suspicion; they were now engaged, in their own agencies and corporate departments, in an increasingly desperate personal struggle for survival and success. It is therefore hardly surprising that they constantly reaffirmed and reinterpreted the success ethic in the dominant parables and iconographic expressions of advertising in the early 1930s.

Retrenchment and Morale Boosting

In the general prosperity of the late 1920s, American advertising had flourished as never before. Few agency executives or trade journal editors had been too modest to credit advertising with prime responsibility for the business boom.
entitled “Actual Visits to P&G Homes” or “Actual Letters from P&G Homes,”
2. TeSelle, Speaking in Parables, pp. 70, 72, 79.
3. For comparisons of melodrama and tragedy, see John Cawelti, Adventure, Mystery, and Romance (Chicago, 1976), pp. 20, 38, 40.
7. Saturday Evening Post, Apr. 4, 1931, pp. 118–19.
8. This “tragedy of manners” represents a consolidation of the following ads: Saturday Evening Post, June 15, 1929, p. 148; Nov. 9, 1929, p. 165; Better Homes and Gardens, Oct. 1929, p. 99; Aug. 1930, p. 49.
Eight Visual clichés: Fantasies and Icons


6. Printers' Ink, Aug. 16, 1928, p. 69; Saturday Evening Post, June 7, 1930, p. 76-77. See also Saturday Evening Post, May 10, 1930, p. 190.


10. Examples of the window-on-the-factory motif were common throughout the 1920s. Very few appeared after 1929.


22. For examples of typical 1920s "soft focus," see Saturday Evening Post, June 19, 1926, p. 127; Sept. 29, 1928, p. 97-97; Oct. 5, 1932, p. 92; Dec. 14, 1929, pp. 86-87; Mar. 8, 1930, p. 177; Collier's, Nov. 24, 1928, p. 35.


24. Saturday Evening Post, Sept. 29, 1928, p. 2; Dec. 15, 1928, p. 2; Dec. 8, 1928, p. 151; Scrapbook 379 (Arco-Petro Boilers), Lord and Thomas Archives; at Foote, Cone and Belding Communications, Inc., Chicago.


Nine Advertising in Overalls: Parables and Visual Clichés of the Depression

2. Advertising and Selling, Nov. 27, 1929, p. 18.
3. Ibid., Nov. 13, 1929, p. 17; Nov. 27, 1929, pp. 17-19, 18.
4. Tide, Nov. 29, 1929, p. 8; Dec. 19, 1929, pp. 4-5; San Francisco Examiner, Nov. 7, 1929, p. 33. "Let's Go To Work!" received a Harvard Award for 1929 as "a helpful message at a needed moment" which readers had admired for its "timeliness, common sense, and good humor." The awards committee, however, cited no evidence for its generalizations about reader reaction. The award to Erwin, Wasyk corroborated the argument by critics that the Harvard Awards remained obvions to the question of whether a "good ad" had any practical effect (Harvard University, Graduate School of Business Administration, Harvard Advertising Awards, 1929, [New York, 1930], pp. 8-9).