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THE KRAZE FOR "K"

HUNTING the letter" is nothing novel as a literary device, but it has its ups and downs and experiences its changes of fashion. Once we associated it mainly with poetry. Critics spoke for example of Swinburne's "alliterative obsession," citing lines like his striking apostrophe to Villon:

Bird of the bitter bright gray golden morn

or the beautiful lines from the *Atalanta* chorus:

The mother of months in meadow or plain
With lisp of leaves and ripple of rain

Alliteration had its day of vogue also in the columns of newspapers. Journalists were in demand who could sprinkle a first page with striking alliterative headlines. Some classic examples of their skill which appeared respectively over accounts of a hanging and a murder are "Jerked to Jesus," and "Daring Devilish Dagoes Deal Death." The credit for killing alliteration as a literary device, or as an asset in newspaper headlines, is usually given to P. T. Barnum's publicity agent, Richard F. Hamilton. It was he who made orthodox for circus posters eulogies like "Peerless Prodigies of Physical Phenomena." "Daring Death-Defying Deeds Devilish in Their Desperate Departure from Deliberateness." Alliteration is still relied upon in circus poster advertising and vaudeville announcements, less often in notices of films. Pure literature has ceased to compete. We read daily of "Sylvia Kantor, That Klassy Little Klown, in Artistic

Buffoonery at the Orpheum," or of "Klaudia the Kute Kid of the Circuit," and their ilk.

As illustrated by the Klassy Klown and the Kute Kid, the present slump toward alliteration is mostly confined to the letter "k," and the hunting of it appears most prominently in the language of advertising. For "k" in poetry there was Coleridge's (one is tempted to write Koleridge's) "Kubla Khan," and one recalls Walt Whitman's picturesque respellings "Kanada" and "Kanadian." But love of "k" plays little part in contemporary verse, although it appears abundantly elsewhere. Its rise in favor seems to be bound up with the late agitation for simplified spelling, or the oncoming tide of interest in phonetics. Simplified orthography for advertising is perhaps the most important legacy of the defunct spelling reform movement.

Here is a list of alliterative names from the language of trade. It could be increased by any reader who is observant. Some day such names will no longer be thought attractive or picturesque. They will not be novel enough to catch the eye and therefore to promote sales. Perhaps they and ultra-jazz language in conversation and in journalistic writing will pass together. There are signs that both are beginning to pall a trifle. But, as yet, one who is observant of signs along the streets, or in the shops, or in the columns of newspapers and periodicals, will find makers of automobile goods, of paints, of implements, of fabrics, wearing apparel, and the like, relying conspicu-

ously on alliteration with "k" in naming their products. Witness:

Kars Kleaned Klean. We Klean Klothes Klean. We Klean Klothes Korrekctly. Kwality Kut Klothes. Kopper Kettle Klub Cigars. Keen Kutter Kutlery. Kumback Koffee. Kamp Kook Stoves. Kandy Kid Orchestra. Kash and Karry Grocery. Simmons' K K Kord Tires. Kiddies' Koveralls. Kiddie Kars. Kiddie Klothes. Kleen Kwick Auto Emergency Klenzer. Krank's Kreem for Shaving. Buxton's Key Kase saves the pockets. The Kum-a-Part Kuff Button. Korrekct Koats. Kollege Kut Klothes. Keene's Kwality Kandies at the Kandiditorium. Klay Kompact for Komplexions. Our Grocery Service Klean, Koncise, Kourteous. Our B V D's Klean, Kool, and Komfortable. See our Kumfy Kumforts. Klip-Klap Snaps for Rings. Kut-Kwik Razor Strop. The Klose Klose Hamper. Klever Klippers for Bobby Hair. Kosy Klosure Ideal Auto Tops for Winter. Kute Kitchenettes Kant-Leak Kontainers. Klever Klippers for Hair-kutters.

Following are examples, not of alliteration with "k" but of simplified or novel spellings secured through its use. They take place alongside *Trunx*, *Inx*, *Shur-On* Eyeglasses, *Daintee-Maid* Waists, *Noe-Egul* Hosiery, *Holsum* Bread, *Kno-Glair* Electric Light Shades, *Wear-U-Well* Shoes, and other orthographic manipulations now liked by advertisers.

Soft Sole Kosy Toe Slippers. Klearflax Linen Rugs and Carpeting. Ko-rek-tiv White Oil. Kwickwork Auto Enamel. Kantleek Hot Water Bottle. Kardex for Record Cards. KisselKar Automobile. Anatomik Footwear. Klenzo Tooth Paste. Multikopy Carbon Paper. Kutzit Soap for mechanics. The Stanerek Suit for men. Spalding's Kroflite golf ball. Flintkote paint. Las-tik patch for tire blowouts. Tasty-Kake is the best. Non-Konstricting belt for men. Butter-Krust, the better bread. Nokol automatic oil heating. Rotarex Electric Kook-rite stoves. Kwik-pak Parcel Post laundry cases. Kwality-bilt face brick. Kleen Heet. Konkrete-bilt homes. Kolor Bak banishes gray hair. Non-Krush dress linen.

"Katherine the Komical Kow" and "Krazy Kat" and "Kewt Kwips for the Kiddies" have lately had a stellar rôle in newspaper lore for children and others.

The curious, better perhaps kurious, nomenclature of the Ku Klux Klan is said to constitute part of its spell for its members and to have helped its rapid spread. The Klan makes much of Klansmen and Klannishness. It numbers among its officers, if reports speak true, an Imperial Klaliff and a King Kleagle. It has a revised oath and a revised Kloran, sealed by a prayer of the Imperial Kludd. It holds an Imperial Kloncilium or Klonvocation, rumor says, and there are meetings in a Klavern. Could all this fail to contribute to its success?

The letter "c" is unnecessary in the English alphabet. It has either the value of "k" as in *cure* or of "s" as in *city*. We no longer need it, while there are letters which we do need but do not have, like a symbol for the vowel of *but* as over against the vowel of *full*. The letter "c" had an early start in our language. It was introduced with the Roman alphabet into older England; while "k" was of no very frequent appearance until after the Norman Conquest. But any meagerness in the use of "k" early in our language history is being compensated for now. In editorial columns and in the lore of newspaper humorists one finds spellings like *likker*, *ruf neks*, *nekking*, and *krool*. All in all, there is no mistaking the call of "k" over our kountry, our kurious kontemporary krawing for it, and its konspicuous use in the klever koinages of kommerce.

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