

Blame Sherlock!

by

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As Sherlock Holmes, Conan Doyle's masterful creation, once remarked to Dr. Watson, "You see, but you do not observe." I couldn't help but think of that quotation the other night as I watched TV commercials scroll across the screen. I've found that one of the best ways to watch them is on 'fast forward'...I don't have to see or observe, nor do I have to listen.

As I watched, it struck me what an interesting sequence of commercials the networks (or some obscure traffic manager) have scheduled. Being of a curious nature, I wondered if there was a subliminal social comment being made.

Since I was viewing a previously-taped show, I forwarded through a commercial for a fast food chain. Nothing wrong with the subject matter. Some of my favorite indulgences are found at such places (think DQ's country gravy, Sonic's new cheesecake bites, and Taco Bell's apple/caramel empanada). Then the food commercial was followed by one for medication. Heartburn, I think. Oddly appropriate? I wondered if the scheduler was trying to make a subtle statement about the eating establishment previously advertised.

A commercial for another food product followed. Something frozen, I think. Not impressive, so it was as well that forward moved fast in that case. It was succeeded by a laxative commercial. That's when I began to wonder.

I saw, now I observed in fascination, the set of commercials that ran across the screen during the next break. There was a food commercial, another medication (might have been for arthritis), more food, then a laxative. (I find it rather fascinating in a repulsive sort of way that there seem to be an equal number of food commercials and laxative commercials. Perhaps this says the most about our

society and our world as a whole).

Hmmm. Was I truly seeing a pattern? Or, in the overcrowded brain of the scheduler, was there an unconscious desire to link a logical sequence of events? If it was a deliberate act, perhaps it represented an employee's unspoken desire to cry out to the world a warning. "Watch out! If you eat, you're going to overeat. If you overeat, you're going to have health issues. But you're going to eat again. Then you'll need something to purge your system."

The sad thing about observing things is that once I've started, I can't stop. My brain goes into automatic now whenever a commercial set comes on. Nor does it seem to matter whether I'm fast forwarding through or just letting the drivel plod along at normal speed. After an hour or so, I realize I can't remember anything about the program I just watched, but I can name every commercial, the sequence in which it was shown, and the number of times it occurred within a one-hour span.

This has become frightening to my average mind (I think I can claim average). What have I turned myself into? Will I never be able to watch television as a disinterested viewer again? Will I begin to group other things I observe into patterns, or worse yet, begin to see logic and arrangement in their playing out? It's enough to turn me off from television for life. It certainly makes me more understanding of people like certain scientists who devote their entire lives to explaining the workings of the chaos theory or probing the invisible black matter of the universe.

On the other hand, if I deliberately set myself to NOT observe, but just view television as the "vast wasteland" it's been called, am I ignoring my duty to society in general and mankind as a whole? Perhaps I should quit re-reading Sherlock Holmes stories. Then I'll never recall again being reminded about 'seeing, but not observing.'

Stout fellow, that Watson. He bumbled his way through untold numbers of

tough cases...never observing, but only seeing. Sigh. Perhaps with enough effort and determination, I can make that my pathway through the TV commercial morass.

Of course, what I'd really like to do is let Sir Arthur Conan Doyle somehow know that the clever little admonishment to his faithful sidekick was not original. Doyle lifted it from the Bible...proving that really, very little is sacred...even in the supposed good old days!