

Is there one among us, gentle or simple, rich or poor, young or old, that has not heard of the man who joined the head of a monkey to the tail of a fish, advertised "a mermaid," and "showed" it to the Yankees?—who discovered and bought up a decrepit negress of 80 winters, extracted her teeth, deepened her wrinkles, shaved her head, and palmed her off upon the citizens of the Republic as the Nurse of their patriot, Father Washington, "aged 161!"—who encountered a dwarf at Bridgeport, Charles Stratton by name, 5 years old and 2 feet high, borrowed him from his parents (worthy folks to "loan" their offspring!), taught him to chatter and lie almost in a breath, and, when thoroughly "trained," presented him to the American people as General Tom Thumb, the extraordinary dwarf, 11 years of age "just arrived from England;" brought him to London, and set him before the Queen at Buckingham Palace; persuaded Albert Smith, his "particular friend," to write a piece called *Hop o' my Thumb*, with a view to the exhibition of his short protégé at the theatres, and otherwise bruited his new "article" to such good purpose that the British public in town and country was whipped into "considerable particular" excitement?—who made a trip to the midland counties, in company with the author of *Hop o' my Thumb*, his "particular friend," under whose auspices was purchased the happy family of "200" beasts, to be added to that famous American Museum of "500,000 objects," so honourably purloined, with the spirited co-operation of "Noah, Beach, Ropes," and Co., from the unlucky "Incorporated Company"—who erected "Humbug Palace" (Iranistan), in which he dwells, legitimate lord and master; discoursed, like Oily Gammon, in honeyed words, of Temperance; made sermons, like the priests of Moloch, "in the Grove;" and capped his exploits by putting salt upon the quivering tail of the veritable "Swedish Nightingale," whom he lured to "the States," proclaimed a "Saint" as well as singer, quite as charitable as vocal, more modest and discreet even than melodious, until, perceiving that he had at last met with his match, in another sort of general than General Tom Thumb, a general to out-general that general's prime minister, he "broke with" the "Nightingale," and retired to Iranistan ("Humbug Palace"), there to rest for a time on his bays, and suck iced-water through a quill instead of sherry-cobbler and mint julep?—is there one among us who has not heard speak of the man who did all these and many other things of more or less account—the prosperous and pushing, the ingenious, spirited, unabashed, and "go-a-head" Yankee, Phineas Taylor Barnum? If there be such a one, let him declare himself, that his indifference may receive a just rebuke and his ignorance be enlightened. "Not to know" Barnum "argues oneself unknown." We all must know, and all admire him.

Having been repeatedly admonished, by publishers and personal friends, to write the story of his life, Mr. P. T. Barnum, undismayed by circumstances that might have restrained any gentleman-speculator of less notoriety and candour, consented. He was assured that the book would be "readable," and, what was more to his mind, that it would sell. The last reason could not fail to be omnipotent with one whose first instinct had ever been to put money in his purse, no matter by what means; and, to make sure of so desirable a consummation, he resolved, in portraying the many phases of his "checked existence," to "cover up" none of his "so-called humbugs." While describing "with honest pride" the histories of the Museum and the dwarf, he determined not to omit a single one of those minor episodes which, to judgments warped by prejudice, might, by some fatality, assume more questionable shapes and redound less triumphantly to his credit as a man of delicate and strict integrity. In plainer terms, with the hope of rendering his biography a marketable commodity, he was satisfied to contrast his lesser with his nobler qualifications, unfolding the secrets of his peccadilloes between whites, so as to make those grand performances to which he owes his fame stand out in stronger and more dazzling colours, and thus turn both to excellent account. How he contrives himself to distinguish, and to cajole his readers into the fancy of distinguishing, between the good and the indifferent, the honourable and the dis— the doubtful, between that on which he would willingly rest his reputation and that to which he may, perchance, look back with regret, not unaccompanied, however, by a kind of suppressed chuckle—the involuntary homage paid by successful cunning to itself—remains to be seen. Suffice it, the "Life" was written; the book was printed and published in New York, for the edification of the Transatlantic dupes of its author; and has now been reproduced in England—for what end, unless it be intended as an example to avoid, or unless the publishers entertain a hope that English readers may look upon it in the light of a pure romance of fiction—a sort of Yankee *Lasarillo de Tormes*—it would not be easy to pronounce. If the last suggestion, however, be the right one, the work must needs fall dead from the press, since, truth to say, it is by no means a "golden book," but a very dull volume—a commonplace rambling emanation from a mind without penetration, taste, or enthusiasm, which only regards the dark side of nature, and that from an extremely superficial point of view.

Like the autobiography of Hieronymus Cardanus, and the *Confessions* of Jean Jacques, there is much laid bare in the *Life of Mr. P. T. Barnum* that had best been concealed; but as everything is related in a flippant, semi-impertinent tone, while clad in English, almost as lax, indefinite, and slipshod as the principles that animate the writer, it cannot be said of it as of either of the abovenamed masterpieces, that it is delightful reading, *quand même*. On the contrary, it is hard labour to wade through it; and there is little to recompense the pains when you have arrived at the end. Never was confession made up of such a mass of audacious imposture; never did sinner pour into the ears of listening priest such a *galimatias* of irredeemable offences. Mr. Barnum tells the whole world of his misdeeds with an easy confidence that beggars belief. The whole world is the priest to whom he makes his statement. Will it shrive him? We think not. To guess from his patronyme, and the patronymes of his numerous relations, all of which are set down in the book with punctilious accuracy, Mr. Phineas Taylor Barnum may be accounted of Hebrew extraction. He was born at the village of Bethel, in the parish of that name (July 5, 1810)—at least, so he was informed by persons who ought to know; and when, in the pride of manhood, he used to visit the spot, he "acknowledged and revered it accordingly." "Independence Day," he says, had gone by; the cannon was dumb, the smoke had evaporated, and the battles were over, just before he came into the world. To this he attributes the first quality he remembers to have possessed in childhood—that of cowardice. With the instinct (which has never since quitted him) of "keeping out of harm's way," he decamped when a favourite playmate fell through the ice calling on him for succour; and he subsequently submitted to be soundly thrashed, by the same boon companion, as a well-merited reward for his pusillanimity. His father was a wag and fond of practical jokes; so was the son, albeit "a man of peace," and more addicted to outreaching his friends and acquaintances by superior cunning than overmatching them by superior bodily strength. Nevertheless, his early teachers "used the *ferule* prodigiously," and young Barnum was accustomed not only to corporal chastisement but also to solitary confinement. His nature remained unchanged, however, while his love of mischief prevailed, and often got him into ugly scrapes. His "organ of acquisitiveness" was large, and before he was five years old he began to accumulate pennies, &c., till at one period he had saved as much as a dollar in coppers—for which Mr. Stiles Wakelee, a tavern-keeper, gave him a silver piece in exchange. Phineas, thus encouraged, went on saving. His father allowed him 10 cents a-day for riding a horse in front of the ox-team, and his hours of leisure into "cookania," or pedlaring." He boiled gingers into "cookania," or candy, and sold it, with gingerbread, cherry-rum, and other holiday gifts, till he got so rich that old Barnum, the elder, made him buy his own clothes. This "reduced his pile," but steadily "looking out for the main chance," as he tells us, our promising "chip of the old block" soon became sole proprietor of a sheep, a calf, and other "individual" goods and chattels; so that at 12 years of age he found himself "quite a man of substance." About this time young Barnum accompanied a Mr. Daniel Brown to New York, where he devoted all his money, together with two pocket-handkerchiefs and a pair of stockings, to purchasing sticks of molasses candy.

This was but retributive justice for the sly uses to which he had put the same enticing sweetmeat somewhat earlier. There would seem, by the way, in molasses candy to have existed some occult sympathy, which touched a secret chord in Barnum's nature, so frequently does he allude to it. On returning home he became clerk to a "cash, credit and barter store"—a sort of huckster's shop, where everything was sold, from hats and axe-helves to hickory nuts. He had, among other offices, to take down the shutters, sweep the shop, and make the fire; but, though he always entertained "an aversion to hand-work," and a predilection for "head-work," he easily consoled himself, as he confesses, with the notion of "being a merchant." Perhaps, in his dreams at night, he may have beheld n ermaids' tails standing upon the edges of the axe-helves, tiny dwarfs start out from every nutshell, and "nightingales" from under every hat—a foresight of his future destiny and greatness; at any rate, his propensities for money-making grew with his growth; and obtaining the privilege of selling candles on his own account, with the old instinct "that never left him," he bestowed more pains and eloquence in persuading customers to buy his own rushlights and mutton dips than any of his employer's variegated wares. "I have found through life," says Mr. Barnum, with the complacency of one expounding a wholly novel doctrine, that "wherever there are conflicting interests men are very apt to think of self first, and so, I fear, it was with me." No doubt of it.

As a specimen of the kind of education Barnum was obtaining, at an age when so much depends upon ideas of purity and correctness being stamped on the impressionable mind of youth, we must quote a paragraph, or rather an extract from a paragraph, which would go far to excuse even a larger contempt for what the world calls probity than was declared by our hero in his subsequent career as exhibitor of prodigies and monsters. For a short time he acted as clerk to a Mr. Taylor; and the following will show in what manner business was carried on, and what elevated notions of honesty and truth such proceedings must have suggested to the imagination of a lad of 17:—

"They have a proverb in Connecticut, that the best school in which to make a boy learn human nature is to permit him to be a tin pedlar for a few years. I think his chances of getting his eye-teeth out would be equally great in a country barter store like that in which I was clerk. Many of our customers were hatters, and we took hats in payment for goods. The hatters mixed their inferior furs with a little of their best, and sold us hats for 'otter.' We, in return, mixed our sugars, teas, and liquors, and gave them the most valuable names. It was dog eat dog—tit for tat. Our cottons were sold for wools, our wool and cotton for silk and linen; in fact, nearly everything was different from what it was represented. The customers cheated us in their fabrics; we cheated the customers with our goods. Each party expected to be cheated, if it was possible," &c.

Compare the above "study of human nature (!)"—which only constitutes a fraction of the catalogue of cheats and swindles practised as a matter of course—with the impositions of the "Fejee Mermaid," the "Woolly Horse," and "Washington's Nurse," &c., and, deriving great things from small, these last may be at least easier understood, if not extenuated or forgiven. The early history of Mr. Barnum absolutely teams with such confessions, which, moreover, are invariably recorded in a style of janty satisfaction, never evoking one word of shame or repentance from their hero. And yet, ever and anon, in juxtaposition with these unblushing avowals of disintegrity, we find such passages as the following, which show forth their enormity in still more strong relief:—

"My habits generally were not bad. Although constantly engaged in selling liquors to others, I probably never drank a pint of liquor, wine, or cordials before I was 22. I always attended church regularly, and was never without a Bible in my trunk, which I took frequent occasion to read!"

But of our hero's younger days we think we have said enough. To be brief; thus was hatched the egg whence later came the phoenix to which "go-a-head" and speculative Yankeeland has paid something less than divine honours. In these petty incidents we can see much of the adult shadowed forth. The child was father to the man. The little Phineas was not unworthy of the after fullgrown Barnum.

There are anecdotes of petty rascality in the first half of the "Life" to fill the columns of this journal. We have no space for more, and must pass over the ingenious lottery schemes of "Dr. Peter Strickland" (one of the pseudonyms of Mr. Barnum); the stratagem by which our hero got rid of his "bottles" and "tin-ware;" the temptation of clergymen, deacons, and the "weak brothers of the *Shakers*," who were all enticed into the fatal vortex; and twenty other matters of equally graphic interest, contenting ourselves with one example of the style in which Mr. P. T. Barnum worked off his lottery tickets, and thereby served his turn:—

"Whenever I visited Brookfield I called on one man who was of a serious turn. He and his wife were professors of religion, and he was a frequent exhorter at prayer-meetings. He always managed to buy a ticket or two from me, under the strictest injunction never to divulge the fact to his wife. I usually dined with him; and when he was busy, looking after my horse, or otherwise engaged out of doors, I never failed to sell a ticket to his wife, who begged me to be careful not to let her husband have any suspicion of it, for he was opposed to such things, and would never forgive her if he should know there was a lottery ticket in the house."

Ferdinand Count Fathom himself could hardly have transcended this. But we repeat, it is only one incident out of 20 of similar delinquency.

(To be continued.)