

THE

Humbugs of the World.

BY

P. T. BARNUM.

“Omne ignotum pro mirifico.”—“Wonderful, because mysterious.”

I ONCE met a man, who made nerve and bone all-healing salve; he was an enterprising kind of fellow, so he thought he would experiment a little with it. He first cut off his dog's tail, and applied some to the stump—a new tail grew out immediately. He then applied some to the piece of the tail which he cut off, and a new dog grew out. He did not know which dog was which.

Old Traveller's Story.

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE.

MR. BARNUM'S whole career has been a very transparent one. He has never befooled the public to its injury, and, though his name has come to be looked upon as a synonym for humbuggery, there never was a public man who was less of one.

After the burning of the Museum, and his temporary retirement from New York, a public journal thus spoke of him :—"The hearty good wishes of many good men and the sympathies of the community in which he has lived, go with him, and the public he has so long amused, but never abused, will be ready to sustain him whenever he makes another appeal to them."

Mr. Barnum is a very good sort of representative Yankee. When crowds of traders and manufacturers in Liverpool, Manchester, and London, flocked to hear his lectures on the art of making money, they expected to hear from him some very smart recipes for knavery; but they were as much astonished as they were edified to learn that the only secret he had to tell them was to be honest, and not to expect something for nothing.

Those who look upon Barnum as a mere charlatan, have really no knowledge of him. It would be easy

CHAPTER XXXIII.

The Miscegenation Hoax—A Great Literary Sell—Political Humbugging—Tricks of the Wire-pullers—Machinery Employed to Render the Pamphlet Notorious—Who were Sold and How it was Done.

SOME persons say that "all is fair in politics." Without agreeing with this doctrine, I nevertheless feel that the history of Ancient and Modern Humbugs would not be complete without a record of the last and one of the most successful of known literary hoaxes. This is the pamphlet entitled "Miscegenation," which advocates the blending of the white and black races upon this continent, as a result not only inevitable from the freeing of the negro, but desirable as a means of creating a more perfect race of men than any now existing. This pamphlet is a clever political quiz; and was written by three young gentlemen of the *World* newspaper, namely, D. G. Croly, George Wakeman, and E. C. Howell.

The design of "Miscegenation" was exceedingly ambitious, and the machinery employed was probably among the most ingenious and audacious ever put into operation to procure the indorsement of absurd theories and give the subject the widest notoriety. The object was to so make use of the prevailing ideas of the extremists of the Anti-Slavery party, as to induce them to accept doctrines which would be obnoxious to the great mass of the community, and which would, of course, be used in the political canvass which was to ensue. It was equally important that the "Democrats" should be made to believe that the pamphlet in question emanated from a "Republican" source. The idea was suggested by a discourse delivered by Mr. Theodore Tilton, at the Cooper Institute, before the American Anti-Slavery Society, in May, 1863, on the Negro, in which that distinguished orator argued, that in some future time the blood of the negro would form one of the mingled bloods of the great regenerated American nation. The scheme once conceived, it began immediately to be put into execution. The first

stumbling-block was the name "amalgamation," by which this fraternizing of the races had been always known. It was evident that a book advocating amalgamation would fall still-born, and hence some new and novel word had to be discovered, with the same meaning, but not so objectionable. Such a word was coined by the combination of the Latin *miscere*, to mix, and *gens*, race; from these, miscegenation—a mingling of the races. The word is as euphonious as "amalgamation," and much more correct in meaning. It has passed into the language, and no future dictionary will be complete without it. Next, it was necessary to give the book an erudite appearance, and arguments from ethnology must form no unimportant part of this matter. Neither of the authors being versed in this science, they were compelled to depend entirely on encyclopedias and books of reference. This obstacle to a New York editor or reporter was not so great as it might seem. The public are often favoured in our journals with dissertations upon various abstruse matters by men who are entirely ignorant of what they are writing about. It was said of Cuvier that he could restore the skeleton of an extinct animal if he were only given one of its teeth, and so a competent editor or reporter of a city journal can get up an article of any length upon any given subject, if he is only furnished one word or name to start with. There was but one writer on ethnology distinctly known to the authors, which was Prichard; but that being secured, all the rest came easily enough. The authors went to the Astor Library and secured a volume of Prichard's works, the perusal of which of course gave them the names of many other authorities, which were also consulted; and thus a very respectable array of scientific arguments in favour of Miscegenation were soon compiled. The sentimental and argumentative portions were quickly suggested from the knowledge of the authors of current politics, of the vagaries of some of the more visionary reformers, and from their own native wit.

The book was at first written in a most cursory manner, the chapters got up without any order or re-

ference to each other, and afterwards arranged. As the impression sought to be conveyed was a serious one, it would clearly not do to commence with the extravagant and absurd theories to which it was intended that the reader should gradually be led. The scientific portion of the work was therefore given first, and was made as grave, and terse, and unobjectionable as possible; and merely urged, by arguments drawn from science and history, that the blending of the different races of men resulted in a better progeny. As the work progressed, they continued to "pile on the agony," until, at the close, the very fact that the statue of the Goddess of Liberty on the Capitol is of a bronze tint, is looked upon as an omen of the colour of the future American!

"When the traveller approaches the City of Magnificent Distances," it says, "the seat of what is destined to be the greatest and most beneficent power on earth, the first object that will strike his eye will be the figure of Liberty surmounting the Capitol; not white, symbolizing but one race, nor black, typifying another, but a statue representing the composite race, whose sway will extend from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean, from the Equator to the North Pole—the Missegens of the Future."

The book once written, plans were laid to obtain the indorsement of the people who were to be humbugged. It was not only necessary to humbug the members of the Reform and Progressive party, but to present—as I have before said—such serious arguments that Democrats should be led to believe it as a *bonâ fide* revelation of the "infernal" designs of their antagonists. In both respects there was complete success. Although, of course, the mass of the Republican leaders entirely ignored the book, yet a considerable number of Anti-Slavery men, with more transcendental ideas, were decidedly "sold." The machinery employed was exceedingly ingenious. Before the book was published proof-copies were furnished to every prominent abolitionist in the country, and also to prominent spiritual mediums, to Ladies known to wear Bloomers, and to all that portion of our population who are supposed to be a little "soft" on the subject of reform. A circular was also enclosed, requesting them, before the publica-

tion of the book, to give the author the benefit of their opinions as to the value of the arguments presented, and the desirability of the immediate publication of the work; to be enclosed to the American News Company, 121, Nassau-street, New York—the agents for the publishers. The bait took. Letters came pouring in from all sides, and among the names of prominent persons who gave their indorsements were, Albert Brisbane, Parker Pillsbury, Lucretia Mott, Sarah M. Grimke, Angelina G. Weld, Dr. J. McCune Smith, Wm. Wells Brown. Mr. Pillsbury was quite excited over the book, saying, "Your work has cheered and gladdened a winter-morning, which I began in cloud and sorrow. You are on the right track. Pursue it, and the good God speed you." Mr. Theodore Tilton, upon receiving the pamphlet, wrote a note promising to read it, and to write the author a long and candid letter as soon as he had time; and saying that the subject was one to which he had given much thought. The promised letter, I believe, however, was never received; probably because, on a careful perusal of the book, Mr. Tilton "smelt a rat." He might also have been influenced by an ironical paragraph relating to himself, and arguing that, as he was a "pure specimen of the blonde," and "when a young man was noted for his angelic type of feature," his sympathy for the coloured race was accounted for by the natural love of opposites. Says the author with much gravity:—

"The sympathy Mr. Greeley, Mr. Phillips, and Mr. Tilton feel for the negro is the love which the blonde bears for the black; it is the love of race, a sympathy stronger to them than the love they bear to woman. It is founded upon natural law. We love our opposites. It is the nature of things that we should do so, and where Nature has free course, men like those we have indicated, whether Anti-Slavery or Pro-Slavery, Conservative or Radical, Democrat or Republican, will marry and be given in marriage to the most perfect specimens of the coloured race."

So far, things worked favourably; and, having thus bagged a goodly number of prominent reformers, the next effort was to get the ear of the public. Here new machinery was brought into play. A statement was published in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* (a paper

which, ever since the war commenced, has been notorious for its "sensation" news), that a charming and accomplished young mulatto girl was about to publish a book on the subject of the blending of the races, in which she took the affirmative view. Of course, so piquant a paragraph was immediately copied by almost every paper in the country. Various stories, equally ingenious and equally groundless, were set afloat, and public expectation was riveted on the forthcoming work.

Some time in February last, the book was published. Copies of course were sent to all the leading journals. The *Anglo-African*, the organ of the coloured population of New York, warmly and at great length indorsed the doctrine. The *Anti-Slavery Standard*, edited by Mr. Oliver Johnson, gave over a column of serious argument and endorsement to the work. Mr. Tilton, of the *Independent*, was not to be caught napping. In that journal, under date of February 25, 1864, he devoted a two-column leader to the subject of Miscegenation and the little pamphlet in question. Mr. Tilton was the first to announce a belief that the book was a hoax. I quote from his article:—

"Remaining a while on our table unread, our attention was specially called to it by noticing how savagely certain newspapers were abusing it."

"The authorship of the pamphlet is a well-kept secret; at least it is unknown to us. Nor, after a somewhat careful reading, are we convinced that the writer is in earnest. Our first impression was, and remains, that the work was meant as a piece of pleasantry—a burlesque upon what are popularly called the extreme and fanatical notions of certain radical men named therein. Certainly, the essay is not such a one as any of these gentlemen would have written on the subject, though some of their speeches are conspicuously quoted and commended in it."

"If written in earnest, the work is not thorough enough to be satisfactory; if in jest, we prefer Sydney Smith—or Mr. Cleland's Report. Still, to be frank, we agree with a large portion of these pages, but disagree heartily with another portion."

"The idea of scientifically undertaking to intermingle existing populations according to a predetermined plan for reconstructing the human race—for flattening out its present varieties into one

final unvarious dead-level of humanity—is so absurd, that we are more than ever convinced such a statement was not written in earnest!"

Mr. Tilton, however, hints that the coloured race is finally in some degree to form a component part of the future American: and that, in time, "the negro of the South, growing paler with every generation, will at last completely hide his face under the snow."

One of the editorial writers for the *Tribune* was so impressed with the book that he wrote an article on the subject, arguing about it with apparent seriousness, and in a manner which some readers supposed to be rather favourable than otherwise to the doctrine. Mr. Greeley and the publishers, it is understood, were displeased at the publication of the article. The next morning nearly all the city journals had editorial articles upon the subject.

The next point was to get the miscegenation controversy into Congress. The book, with its indorsements, was brought to the notice of Mr. Cox of Ohio (commonly called "Sunset Cox"); and he made an earnest speech on the subject. Mr. Washburne replied wittily, reading and commenting on extracts from a work by Cox, in which the latter deplored the existence of the prejudice against the Africans. A few days after, Mr. Kelly, of Pennsylvania, replied very elaborately to Mr. Cox, bringing all his learning and historical research to bear on the topic. It was the subject of a deal of talk in Washington afterwards. Mr. Cox was charged by some of the more shrewd members of Congress with writing it. It was said that Mr. Sumner, on reading it, immediately pronounced it a hoax.

Through the influence of the authors, a person visited James Gordon Bennett, of the *Herald*, and spoke to him about "Miscegenation." Mr. Bennett thought the idea too monstrous and absurd to waste an article upon.

"But," said the gentleman, "the Democratic papers are all noticing it."

"The Democratic editors are asses," said Bennett.
 "Senator Cox has just made a speech in Congress on it."

"Cox is an ass," responded Bennett.

"Greeley had an article about it the other day."

"Well, Greeley's a donkey."

"The *Independent* yesterday had a leader of a column and a half about it."

"Well, Beecher is no better," said Bennett. "They're all asses. But what did he say about it?"

"Oh, he rather endorsed it."

"Well, I'll read the article," said Bennett. "And perhaps I'll have an article written ridiculing Beecher."

"It will make a very good handle against the radicals," said the other.

"Oh, I don't know," said Bennett. "Let them marry together, if they want to, with all my heart."

For some days, the *Herald* said nothing about it, but the occasion of the departure of a coloured regiment from New York City having called forth a flattering address to them from the ladies of the "Loyal League," the *Herald* saw a chance to make a point against Mr. Charles King and others; and the next day it contained a terrific article, introducing miscegenation in the most violent and offensive manner, and saying that the ladies of the "Loyal League" had offered to marry the coloured soldiers on their return! After that, the *Herald* kept up a regular fusillade against the supposed miscegenic proclivities of the Republicans. And thus, after all, Bennett swallowed the "critter," horns, hoofs, tail, and all.

The authors even had the impudence to attempt to entrap Mr. Lincoln into an endorsement of the work, and asked permission to dedicate a new work, on a kindred subject, "Melankation," to him. Honest Old Abe, however, who can see a joke, was not to be taken in so easily.

About the time the book was first published, Miss Anne E. Dickinson happened to lecture in New York. The authors here exhibited a great degree of acuteness

and tact, as well as sublime impudence, in seizing the opportunity to have some small handbills, with the endorsement of the book, printed and distributed by boys among the audience. Before Miss Dickinson appeared, therefore, the audience were gravely reading the miscegenation handbill; and the reporters, noticing it, coupled the facts in their reports. From this, it went forth, and was widely circulated, that Miss Dickinson was the author!

Dr. Mackay, the correspondent of the London *Times*, in New York, was very decidedly sold, and hurled all manner of big words against the doctrine in his letters to "The Thunderer," and thus "the leading paper of Europe" was, for the hundredth time during the American Rebellion, decidedly taken in and done for.

The *Saturday Review*—perhaps the cleverest and certainly the sauciest of the English hebdomadals—also berated the book and its authors in the most pompous language at its command. Indeed, the *Westminster Review* seriously refers to the arguments of the book in connexion with Dr. Broca's pamphlet on Human Hybridity, a most profound work. "Miscegenation" was republished in England by Trübner & Co.; and very extensive translations from it are still passing the rounds of the French and German papers.

Thus passes into history one of the most impudent as well as ingenious literary hoaxes of the present day. There is probably not a newspaper in the country but has printed much about it; and enough of extracts might be collected from various journals upon the subject to fill my whale-tank.

It is needless to say that the book passed through several editions. Of course, the mass of the intelligent American people rejected the doctrines of the work, and looked upon it either as a political dodge, or as the ravings of some crazy man; but the authors have the satisfaction of knowing that it achieved a notoriety which has hardly been equalled by any mere pamphlet ever published in this country.