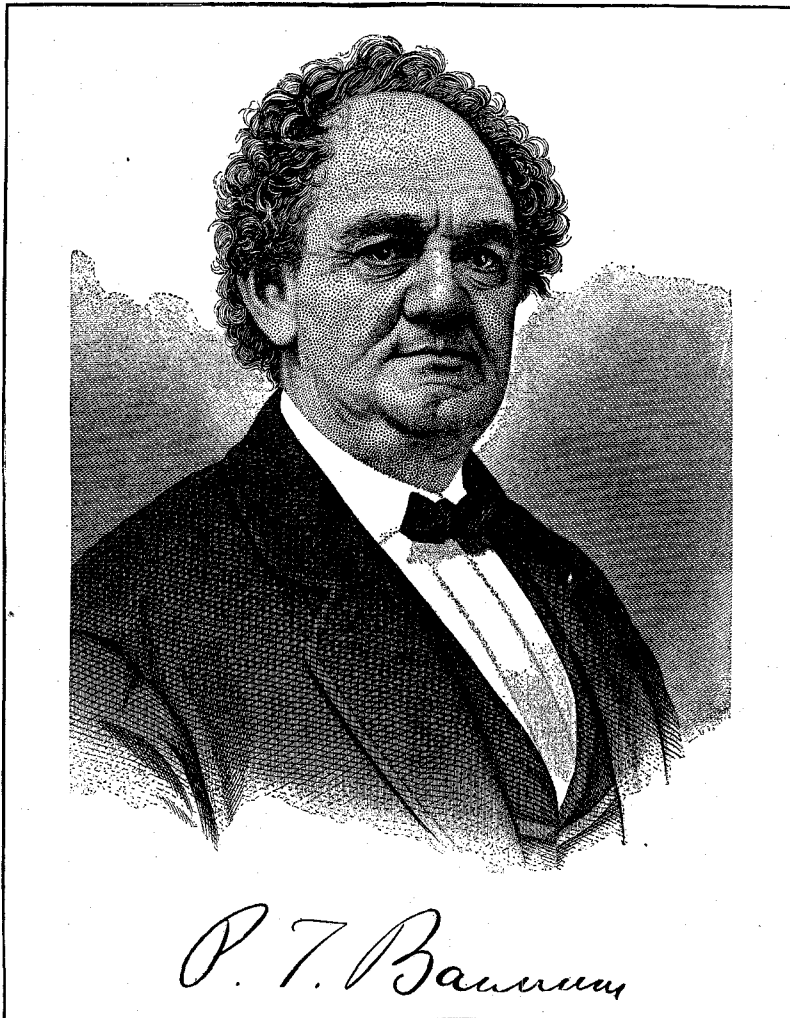


SNAP-SHOTS OF MY CONTEMPORARIES

BY LYMAN ABBOTT

P. T. BARNUM, SHOWMAN



From "Struggles and Triumphs," by P. T. Barnum

"He was frankly an entertainer, and not a reformer. If I am right in defining a good-natured man as a man who desires to make other people happy, then the word good-natured would adequately describe him"

I HAVE a liking for the faith of the small boy who said to his mother, "God must have laughed when he made a monkey." Why not? If we argue from the beauty in the world that the Creator has an appreciation of beauty, why not from the humor in humanity that the Creator has a sense of humor? I have read the story of a dancer who, being converted, thereafter expressed his devotion to the Virgin Mary by daily dancing before her as the best possible method of bringing her honor. Dickens has rendered a good service by his sympathetic picture of the life behind the curtain in his portrait of the Crummles family, and by his sympathetic picture of life in the sawdust ring by his portrait of Mr. Sleary. Let the reader of this article, then, understand the writer's point of view. There is a place in God's world for play, and the pro-

fessional entertainer is doing God service if he carries into his profession the spirit of honesty, generosity, and purity—that is, if he gives his audience their money's worth, treats his employees and associates with generosity, and rigorously excludes from his entertainments anything which panders to vice or tends to degradation.

In my collection of autographs, which number nearly if not quite a thousand, is the following characteristic letter from P. T. Barnum, written to me in answer to a request for some information concerning Tom Thumb:

Waldemere,
Bridgeport, Ct.,
Oct. 5, 1878.

Rev. Lyman Abbott:

Dear Sir—Your letter is read, and I with pleasure enclose an explanation of the T. T. matter.

By the way my big show opens at Gilmore's Garden on the 14th inst for a month & I hope you will take

occasion to see a really sound & interesting Exhibition. Truly yours,
P. T. BARNUM.

I call this letter¹ interesting not merely, not mainly, because it exhibits the born advertiser, but because it illustrates what I think was very characteristic of Mr. Barnum, his professional pride. He was a great showman, and he was proud of being a great showman; a great advertiser, and he had naïve pride in his curiously ingenious advertising schemes. He made it clear in his autobiography that he considered himself called to be a showman; the business came to him, he did not seek it out. Looking back from his first success as the creator of "Barnum Museum," he writes:

The business for which I was destined, and I believe made, had not yet come to me; or rather, I had not found that I was to cater for that insatiate want of human nature—the love of amusement; that I was to make a sensation on two continents; and that fame and fortune awaited me so soon as I should appear before the public in the character of a showman. These things I had not foreseen. I did not seek the position or the character. The business finally came in my way. I fell into the occupation, and far beyond any of my predecessors on this continent, I have succeeded.

He did not conduct his enterprise to elevate society. He was frankly a entertainer, and not a reformer. If I am right in defining a good-natured man as a man who desires to make other people happy, then the word good-natured would adequately describe him. He was desirous of making money and took at times what might be called a gambler's chance in making it. But he was much more than a mere money-maker. If from any entertainment which he provided the spectator had gone away disappointed, he would have regarded the entertainment as a failure, no matter what money brought him. His ideals were not at ways of the highest, but he lived up to them. He never sacrificed his self-respect in order to get the money of the public into his own pocket. He writes "As I always justly boasted, no one could visit my Museum and go away without feeling that he had received the full worth of his money." It was his ambition—and it was gratified—"to have men and women all over the country say: 'There is not another place in the United States where so much can be seen for twenty-five cents as in Barnum's American Museum.'"

When I came to New York City I

¹ The original is reproduced in facsimile on the front cover of this number.—The Editors.

1849 to enter the New York University, Barnum's American Museum was one of the best-known show places in the city. It was situated on the corner of Ann Street and Broadway, in what was then the center of a city which now has grown so great that it has no center, because it has many centers. Opposite it on Broadway was the best-known hotel in the city, the Astor House; three or four blocks to the north was the best-known restaurant, Delmonico's; between the two was "The Park," and in the Park the City Hall. The two most famous Episcopal churches of the city, Trinity and St. Paul's, were one five or six minutes' walk distant, the other on the corner opposite the Astor House. St. George's (Episcopal) and the Brick Church (Presbyterian) had a few years before moved farther uptown. The "Tribune" and the "Times" newspapers were close at hand. There were then no traffic policemen, and the picture which accompanies this article, taken by permission from Valentine's "Manual," represents a scene which might be witnessed at that point almost any hour of any day. In the afternoon a band of half a dozen pieces played on a balcony overhanging the street. At night a curious kaleidoscopic collection of highly colored and illuminated glasses was kept by some contrivance boiling and bubbling on the walls of the Museum.

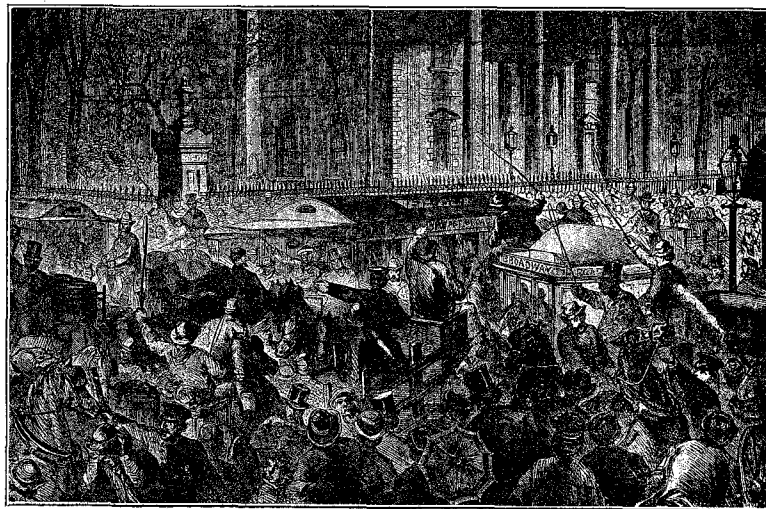
Within the Museum was a constantly increasing collection of all sorts of curiosities, real and spurious, natural and artificial. This was long before the days of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Natural History Museum, and before the days when those serious and instructive unadvertised collections would have drawn any such group of spectators as they now draw. It was a more credulous, perhaps a more curious, age. Periodically the newspapers took up the question, Is there a sea serpent? for serious discussion. When, therefore, Mr. Barnum advertised a "Feejee Mermaid," the people thronged to see it. In truth, it was a curiosity, though an artificial one. A naturalist whose judgment on it he obtained replied that "he could not conceive how it could have been manufactured, for he never saw a monkey with such peculiar teeth, arms, hands, etc., and he never saw a fish with such peculiar fins; but he did not believe in mermaids." But it served Mr. Barnum's purpose; it advertised his Museum. He subsequently concluded that it was a product of Japanese ingenuity. He purchased for \$200 a model of Niagara Falls in which the proportions of the falls, the hills, rocks, buildings, etc., in the vicinity were given with mathematical accuracy, "while the absurdity was in introducing 'real water' to represent the falls." When the Water Commissioners summoned him to pay an extra water tax, he showed them that the water flowed back into a res-

ervoir, from which it was pumped up to repeat its service. "A single barrel of water, if my pump was in good order, would furnish my falls for a month." The hazard and expense of new enterprises did not daunt him. He learned of the capture of a white whale at or near the mouth of the St. Lawrence; sent up an expedition; captured two; built a tank of salt water in the basement of the Museum; and while they lived they proved a paying feature.

These attractions served as advertisements, but he did not depend upon them. As an inventive advertiser he has had, I rather think, no equal in the history of American advertisers. A tramp applied to him for a job; would be glad to do anything for a dollar a day. Barnum gave him a breakfast, then told him to lay a brick on the corner of Broadway and Ann Street, another close by the Museum, a third on the corner of Broadway and Vesey Street, and a fourth on the sidewalk in front of St. Paul's Church; then with a fifth brick in hand to "take up a rapid march from one to the other, making the circuit, exchanging your brick at every point and say nothing to any one." At the end of an hour the sidewalk was packed with curious people watching the inexplicable proceeding and enough of the number followed the brick-layer at the end of each cycle into the Museum to more than pay for his hire. The profit to Mr. Barnum was in the talk created and the consequent free advertising of the Museum. He announced baby shows with prizes for the finest baby, the fattest, the handsomest. Emulous mothers crowded the Museum and the reports of the baby shows found their way into the newspapers far and near. He set an elephant in charge of a keeper in Oriental costume plowing on a six-acre lot close beside the track of the New York and New Haven Railroad. The keeper was furnished with a time-table, and did his plowing when

trains were passing. A friendly farmer criticised him for his folly. "Your elephant," he said, "can't draw as much as two pair of my oxen can." "You are mistaken, my friend," replied Mr. Barnum; "he can draw more than forty yoke of oxen; for he can draw the attention of twenty millions of American citizens to Barnum's Museum!"

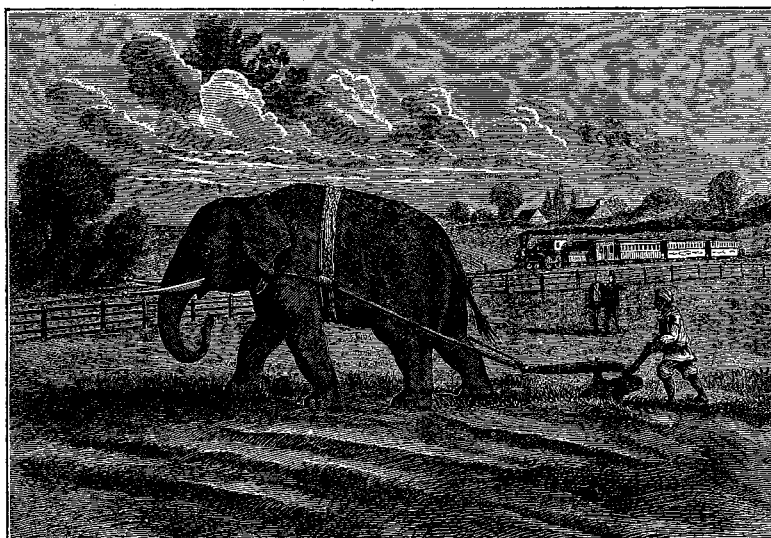
One important feature of the Museum was its "Lecture Room." The theater had a bad name, and thousands of people came every year to New York City who would not go to a theater but who were delighted to go to Barnum's Lecture Room to be entertained by what in these days would be called a vaudeville performance. They included "educated dogs, industrious fleas, automata, jugglers, ventriloquists, living statuary, tableaux, gypsies, albinos, fat boys, giants, dwarfs, rope-dancers," and the like. But from the first the Lecture Room differed from the average theater—certainly the cheaper ones—in more than a name. Barnum forbade what was common at that time—the setting apart of a certain section of the house, popularly known as the "third tier," where women of the town might ply their trade. He would allow no bar upon the premises, and, finding some of his patrons going out, as was the custom, for a drink between the acts, he ceased giving return checks to such as went out. My shadowy recollection of that time confirms his claim that he allowed on the stage no indelicacies of costume and no salacious dialogues. When the reputation of the Lecture Room was established, he substituted for the "educated dogs, industrious fleas," and the like, "moral dramas" such as "Uncle Tom's Cabin" and "The Drunkard." In his Philadelphia Museum, where the prejudice against the theater was greater than in New York, the Lecture Room was very popular; and when "The Drunkard" was being played there was a temperance pledge at the box-office which thousands signed,



From "Valentine's Manual, 1918-1919"

BROADWAY AND FULTON STREET NEAR BARNUM'S MUSEUM IN 1866

"When I came to New York City in 1849 to enter New York University, Barnum's Museum was one of the best-known show places in the city. . . . There were then no traffic policemen"



From "Struggles and Triumphs," by P. T. Barnum

"He set an elephant in charge of a keeper in Oriental costume plowing on a six-acre lot close beside the track of the New York and New Haven Railroad. The keeper was furnished with a time-table, and did his plowing when trains were passing"

and in his autobiography he tells us, "Almost every hour during the day and evening women could be seen bringing their husbands to the Museum to sign the pledge."

Mr. Barnum had inherited from his father and grandfather an irrepressible fondness for practical jokes, and he sometimes played them upon the public. But he always did it in such a fashion that the public enjoyed the joke with him. That his "humbuggery" did not impair the public faith in his commercial honesty is sufficiently established by two incidents. When he wanted to buy Scudder's American Museum, which was financially a failure but which he believed he could make a financial success, he borrowed the necessary \$15,000 on his personal credit, giving as security the purchased collection; and when eight years later, in order to carry out his contract with Jenny Lind, he had to deposit in the hands of her bankers in London the sum of \$187,500, he borrowed a considerable portion of the sum largely on the confidence which American bankers had in his commercial ability and his financial honesty.

I have defined Mr. Barnum as a good-natured man and defined a good-natured man as one who desires to make other men happy. This is not the highest ambition of which man is capable, but it is a not unworthy ambition, and in Mr. Barnum it appeared not only in his resolve to send away contented all those who came to his entertainments, but also in his resolve to make his associates and his employees sharers in his happiness. The cynics may say that this is good business. I think it is. But not every one has sufficient faith in this principle as good business to practice it. A slight illustration of Mr. Barnum's faith in it is furnished by his giving a dollar and a half a day to the brick-laying tramp, who only asked for a dollar a day; a better illustration,

by his steady increase in Tom Thumb's share in the profits of their joint enterprise as its increasing profitableness became manifest. But the most striking illustration is that furnished by his proposal to Jenny Lind to change the contract between them after the first auction sale of tickets had taken place and before the first concert. This change I copy from Mr. Barnum's autobiography:

On the Tuesday after her arrival I informed Miss Lind that I wished to make a slight alteration in our agreement. "What is it?" she asked in surprise?

"I am convinced," I replied, "that our enterprise will be much more successful than either of us anticipated. I wish, therefore, to stipulate that you shall receive not only \$1,000 for each concert besides all the expenses, as heretofore agreed on, but after taking \$5,500 per night for expenses and my services, the balance shall be equally divided between us."

Jenny looked at me with astonishment. She could not comprehend my proposition. After I had repeated it and she fully understood its import, she cordially grasped me by the hand, and exclaimed, "Mr. Barnum, you are a gentleman of honor; you are generous; it is just as Mr. Bates told me; I will sing for you as long as you please; I will sing for you in America—in Europe—anywhere."

Mr. Barnum ends the narrative of his engagement with her by a financial statement of the "total receipts, excepting of concerts devoted to charity." They are given in detail. We report only the totals:

Jenny Lind's net avails of 95 concerts.....	\$176,675.09
P. T. Barnum's gross receipts after paying Miss Lind	535,486.25
Total receipts of 95 concerts	\$712,161.34

Mr. Barnum does not state what his

net profits were; but as he paid all the expenses, including traveling expense and hotel bills for Jenny Lind and the entire musical company, the amount to be deducted from the gross receipts must have been considerable.

That Mr. Barnum recognized the human values as well as the commercial possibilities of his "natural curiosities" is evident from his relations with the famous dwarf, "General Tom Thumb." Mr. Barnum's own name for Charles Stratton, whom he discovered as a child of five and so trained that when the boy went some two years later to be exhibited in France Mr. Barnum won a judgment from the authorities that the "General's" presentation of various characters in costume entitled him to be counted an actor and therefore liable only for the eleven per cent "theatrical license" and not the twenty-five per cent license for "natural curiosities." From the European tour from which they returned in 1847, when the "little General" was ten years of age, Tom Thumb's father had acquired a fortune from which he settled a large sum upon his valuable son. Some ten years later, when Mr. Barnum "failed" as the result of an extensive real estate development enterprise, among the letters of friendly offers which came to him was the following:

Jones' Hotel, Philadelphia,
May 12, 1856.

My dear Mr. Barnum.—I understand your friends, and that means "all creation," intend to get up some benefits for your family. Now, my dear sir, just be good enough to remember that I belong to that mighty crowd, and I must have a finger (or at least a "thumb") in that pie. I am bound to appear on all such occasions in some shape, from "Jack the Giant Killer," up stairs, to the doorkeeper down, whichever may serve you best; and there are some feats that I can perform as well as any other man of my inches. I have just started out on my western tour, and have my carriage, ponies and assistants all here, but I am ready to go on to New York, bag and baggage, and remain at Mrs. Barnum's service as long as I, in my small way, can be useful. Put me into any "heavy" work, if you like. Perhaps I cannot lift as much as some other folks, but just take your pencil in hand and you will see I can draw a tremendous load. I drew two hundred tons at a single pull today, embracing two thousand persons, whom I hauled up safely and satisfactorily to all parties, at one exhibition. Hoping that you will be able to fix up a lot of magnets that will attract all New York, and volunteering to sit on any part of the loadstone, I am, as ever, your little but sympathizing friend,

GEN. TOM THUMB.

Although Mr. Barnum felt compelled to refuse this offer, he could hardly have forgotten it. When he had so far recovered himself that he was free to do so, he again went abroad, taking with him the "little General," repeating the former successes, and canceling his

indebtedness at the end of four years. In 1862 the General had a country home in Bridgeport where he spent his "intervals of rest with his horses, and especially with his yacht, for his fondness for the water was his great passion." On one of his trips to New York, upon which occasions he always visited the Museum and Mr. Barnum, he met a recent acquisition of the showman, Lavinia Warren, a dwarf, a "most intelligent and refined young lady, well educated and an accomplished, beautiful and perfectly developed woman in miniature." With the hearty sympathy of Mr. Barnum the young people shortly became engaged and Miss Warren was released from her contract to go abroad for exhibition. Moreover, although Mr. Barnum "did not hesitate to seek continued advantage from the notoriety of the prospective marriage," when his offer of fifteen thousand dollars if they would postpone the wedding for a month was declined, he did not lose his human interest with the monetary loss.

"It was suggested to me," Mr. Barnum explained, "that a small fortune in itself could be easily made out of the excitement. 'Let the ceremony take place in the Academy of Music, charge a big price for admission, and the citizens will come in crowds.' I have no manner of doubt that in this way twenty-five thousand dollars would easily have been obtained. But I had no such thought. I had promised to give the couple a genteel and graceful wedding, and I kept my word."

The ceremony took place in Grace Church, in the presence of an audience of ladies and gentlemen admitted only by cards of invitation, even to the exclusion of a highly irate pew owner, who afterwards wrote the rector a sharp letter of protest and received



From "Struggles and Triumphs," by P. T. Barnum

"The ceremony took place in Grace Church, in the presence of an audience of ladies and gentlemen admitted only by cards of invitation. . . . Not a ticket was sold"

from him a sharp though perfectly courteous and dignified reply. Numerous applications were made for tickets to witness the ceremony and as high as sixty dollars was offered for a single admission; but not a ticket was sold, and to the charge brought by disgruntled critics that the marriage was

a money-making scheme Mr. Barnum made the following characteristically good-natured reply:

"It was by no means an unnatural circumstance that I should be suspected of having instigated and brought about that marriage of Tom Thumb with Lavinia Warren. Had I done this, I should at this day have felt no regrets, for it has proved, in an eminent degree, one of the 'happy marriages.'"

If this were a sketch of Mr. Barnum's life, it would be fatally defective, for I have said nothing of his temperance activities, his patriotic services during the Civil War, or his battle, when a member of the Connecticut Legislature, against political corruption of a formidable description. But I have deliberately confined myself to a sketch of his professional career as Showman, in which he did nothing to degrade, something to elevate, and much to entertain his generation.

Hardly a greater contrast can be imagined than that between P. T. Barnum, the enterprising and jocose showman, and the gentle mystic, John Greenleaf Whittier. Next week in his "Snap-Shot" Dr. Abbott will picture the Quaker poet as he saw him.

OUR CHANCE NEXT DOOR

THE OPPORTUNITY THAT OFFERS AFTER REVOLUTION FOR RECONSTRUCTION IN MEXICO

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENCE

MEXICO is so near we have overlooked it. We know more of Japan and the Japanese than we do of our next-door neighbor. We do not know Mexico. We misunderstand and misinterpret Mexico. We do not effectively hear the cry for help from a people seventy-five per cent of whom are illiterate, with the masses in squalor and wretchedness beyond words. President Obregon's administration is largely to settle whether in Mexico there shall be revolution or peace, democracy and hope or despotism; and despair; a nest of Bolshevism just over

the line or social order; disease, with the ravages of yellow fever, bubonic plague, and typhus, or health along our border.

Recent revolutions have been not merely waves of sentiment that have swept one set of officials out of the way to make room for another group, as in other years. They have been the waves of a mighty tide out of the heart of a people blindly but surely moving on toward freedom, equity, and a chance for a living and the larger life. The particular wave may break and recede, but the rising tide in the long

run always reaches the mark. The people believe they have won in the person and triumphant election of Obregon. Not a soldier guarded the polls. The army is being reduced. Obregon has discarded his uniform to emphasize the civil character of his administration. He believes in the people and has their needs in his thought and plans. He insists that his chief mission is to help the people. His firmly expressed desire for friendship, co-operation, and good will with the United States seems to open an era of peace. He has come over to the border to clasp hands with