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HUMBUGS OF THE WORLD.

I. PERSONAL REMINISCENCES.

CHAPTER I.

*General View of the Subject—Humbug Universal—In Religion—
 In Politics—In Business—In Science—In Medicine—How is
 it to Cease?—The Greatest Humbug of all.*

A LITTLE reflection will show that humbug is an astonishingly wide-spread phenomenon—in fact, almost universal. And this is true, although we exclude crimes and arrant swindles from the definition of it, according to the somewhat careful explanation which is given in the beginning of the chapter succeeding this one.

I apprehend that there is no sort of object which men seek to attain, whether secular, moral or religious, in which humbug is not very often an instrumentality. Religion is and has ever been a chief chapter of human life. False religions are the only ones known to two-thirds of the human race, even now, after nineteen centuries of Christianity; and false religions are perhaps the most monstrous, complicated, and thorough-going specimens of humbug that can be found. And even within the pale of Christianity, how unbroken has been the succession of impostors, hypocrites and pretenders, male and female, of every possible variety of age, sex, doctrine and discipline!

Politics and government are certainly among the most important of practical human interests. Now it was a diplomatist—that is, a practical manager of one

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kind of government matters—who invented that wonderful phrase—a whole world full of humbug in half-a-dozen words—that “Language was given to us to conceal our thoughts.” It was another diplomatist who said, “An ambassador is a gentleman sent to *lie* abroad for the good of his country.” But need I explain to my own beloved countrymen that there is humbug in politics? Does anybody go into a political campaign without it? are no exaggerations of *our* candidate’s merits to be allowed? no depreciations of the *other* candidate? Shall we no longer prove that the success of the party opposed to us will overwhelm the land in ruin? Let me see. Leaving out the two elections of General Washington, eighteen times that very fact has been proved by the party that was beaten, and immediately we have *not* been ruined, notwithstanding that the dreadful fatal fellows on the other side got their hands on the offices and their fingers into the treasury.

Business is the ordinary means of living for nearly all of us. And in what business is there not humbug? “There’s cheating in all trades but ours,” is the prompt reply from the boot-maker with his brown paper soles the grocer with his floury sugar and chicoried coffee, the butcher with his mysterious sausages and queer veal, the dry-goods man with his “damaged goods wet at the great fire,” and his “selling at a ruinous loss,” the stock-broker with his brazen assurance that your company is bankrupt and your stock not worth a cent (if he wants to buy it), the horse jockey with his black arts and spavined brutes, the milkman with his tin aquaria, the land-agent with his nice new maps and beautiful descriptions of distant scenery, the newspaper man with his “immense circulation,” the publisher with his “Great American Novel,” the city auctioneer with his “Pictures by the Old Masters”—all and every one protest each his own innocence, and warn you against the deceits of the rest. My inexperienced friend, take it for granted that they all tell the truth—about each other! and then transact your busi-

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ness to the best of your ability on your own judgment. Never fear but that you will get experience enough, and that you will pay well for it too ; and towards the time when you shall no longer need earthly goods, you will begin to know how to buy.

Literature is one of the most interesting and significant expressions of humanity. Yet books are thickly peppered with humbug. "Travellers' stories" have been the scoff of ages, from the "True Story" of witty old Lucian the Syrian down to the gorillarities—if I may coin a word—of the Frenchman, Du Chaillu. Ireland's counterfeited Shakspeare plays, Chatterton's forged manuscripts, George Psalmanazar's forged Formosan language, Joe Smith's Mormon Bible (it should be noted that this and the Koran sounded two strings of humbug together—the literary and the religious), the more recent counterfeits of the notorious Greek Simonides—such literary humbugs as these are equal in presumption and in ingenuity too, to any of a merely business kind, though usually destitute of that sort of impiety which makes the great religious humbugs horrible as well as impudent.

Science is another important field of human effort. Science is the pursuit of pure truth, and the systematizing of it. In such an employment as that, one might reasonably hope to find all things done in honesty and sincerity. Not at all, my ardent and inquiring friends, there is a scientific humbug just as large as any other. We have all heard of the Moon Hoax. Do none of you remember the Hydrarchos Sillimannii, that awful Alabama snake? It was only a little while ago that a grave account appeared in a newspaper of a whole new business of compressing ice. Perpetual motion has been the dream of scientific visionaries, and a pretended but cheating realization of it has been exhibited by scamp after scamp. I understand that one is at this moment being invented over in Jersey City. I have purchased more than one "perpetual motion" myself. Many persons will remember Mr. Paine—"The Great Shot-at" as he was called,

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from his story that people were constantly trying to kill him—and his water-gas. There have been other water-gases too, which were each going to show us how to set the North River on fire, but something or other has always broken down just at the wrong moment. Nobody seems to reflect, when these water-gases come up, that if water could really be made to burn, the right conditions would surely have happened at some one of the thousands of city fires, and that the very stuff with which our stout firemen were extinguishing the flames, would have itself caught and exterminated the whole brave wet crowd!

Medicine is the means by which we poor feeble creatures try to keep from dying or aching. In a world so full of pain it would seem as if people could not be so foolish, or practitioners so knavish, as to sport with men's and women's and children's lives by their professional humbugs. Yet there are many grave M.D.'s who, if there is nobody to hear, and if they speak their minds, will tell you plainly that the whole practice of medicine is in one sense a humbug. One of its features is certainly a humbug, though so innocent and even useful that it seems difficult to think of any objection to it. This is the practice of giving a *placebo*—that is, a bread pill or a dose of coloured water, to keep the patient's mind easy while imagination helps nature to perfect a cure. As for the quacks, patent medicines and universal remedies, I need only mention their names. Prince Hohenlohe, Valentine Greatrakes, John St. John Long, Doctor Graham and his wonderful bed, Mesmer and his tub, Perkins' metallic tractors—these are half a dozen. Modern history knows of hundreds of such.

It would almost seem as if human delusions became more unreasoning and abject in proportion as their subject is of greater importance. A machine, a story, an animal skeleton, are not so very important. But the humbugs which have prevailed about that wondrous machine, the human body, its ailments and its cures, about the unspeakable mystery of human life, and still more about the far greater and more awful

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mysteries of the life beyond the grave, and the endless happiness and misery believed to exist there, the humbugs about these have been infinitely more absurd, more shocking, more unreasonable, more inhuman, more destructive.

I can only allude to whole sciences (falsely so called), which are unmingled humbugs from beginning to end. Such was Alchemy, such was Magic, such was and still is Astrology, and above all, Fortune-telling.

But there is a more thorough humbug than any of these enterprises or systems. The greatest humbug of all is the man who believes—or pretends to believe—that everything and everybody are humbugs. We sometimes meet a person who professes that there is no virtue; that every man has his price, and every woman hers; that any statement from anybody is just as likely to be false as true, and that the only way to decide which, is to consider whether truth or a lie was likely to have paid best in that particular case. Religion he thinks one of the smartest business dodges extant, a first-rate investment, and by all odds the most respectable disguise that a lying or swindling business man can wear. Honour he thinks is a sham. Honesty he considers a plausible word to flourish in the eyes of the greener portion of our race, as you would hold out a cabbage-leaf to coax a donkey. What people want, he thinks, or says he thinks, is something good to eat, something good to drink, fine clothes, luxury, laziness, wealth. If you can imagine a hog's mind in a man's body—sensual, greedy, selfish, cruel, cunning, sly, coarse, yet stupid, short-sighted, unreasoning, unable to comprehend anything except what concerns the flesh, you have your man. He thinks himself philosophic and practical, a man of the world; he thinks to show knowledge and wisdom, penetration, deep acquaintance with men and things. Poor fellow! he has exposed his own nakedness. Instead of showing that others are rotten inside, he has proved that he is. He claims that it is not safe to believe others—it is perfectly safe to disbelieve him. He claims that every man will get the better of you if possible—let him

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alone! Selfishness, he says, is the universal rule—leave nothing to depend on his generosity or honour; trust him just as far as you can sling an elephant by the tail. A bad world, he sneers, full of deceit and nastiness—it is his own foul breath that he smells; only a thoroughly corrupt heart could suggest such vile thoughts. He sees only what suits him, as a turkey-buzzard spies only carrion, though amid the loveliest landscape. I pronounce him who thus virtually slanders his father and dishonours his mother, and defiles the sanctities of home, and the glory of patriotism, and the merchant's honour, and the martyr's grave and the saint's crown—who does not even know that every sham shows that there is a reality, and that hypocrisy is the homage that vice pays to virtue—I pronounce him—no, I do not pronounce him a humbug, the word does not apply to him. He is a fool.

Looked at on one side, the history of humbug is truly humiliating to intellectual pride, yet the long silly story is less absurd during the later ages of history, and grows less and less so in proportion to the spread of real Christianity. This religion promotes good sense, actual knowledge, contentment with what we cannot help, and the exclusive use of intelligent means for increasing human happiness and decreasing human sorrow. And whenever the time shall come when men are kind and just and honest; when they only want what is fair and right, judge only on real and true evidence, and take nothing for granted, then there will be no place left for any humbugs, either harmless or hurtful.

CHAPTER II.

Definition of the Word Humbug—Warren of London—Genin, the Hatter—Gosling's Blacking.

UPON a careful consideration of my undertaking to give an account of the "Humbugs of the World," I

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find myself somewhat puzzled in regard to the true definition of that word. To be sure, Webster says that humbug, as a noun, is an "imposition under fair pretences;" and as a verb, it is "to deceive; to impose on." With all due deference to Doctor Webster, I submit that, according to present usage, this is not the only, nor even the generally accepted, definition of that term.

We will suppose, for instance, that a man with "fair pretences" applies to a wholesale merchant for credit on a large bill of goods. His "fair pretences" comprehend an assertion that he is a moral and religious man, a member of the church, a man of wealth, &c., &c. It turns out that he is not worth a dollar, but is a base, lying wretch, an impostor and a cheat. He is arrested and imprisoned "for obtaining property under false pretences," or, as Webster says, "fair pretences." He is punished for his villany. The public do not call him a "humbug;" they very properly term him a swindler.

A man, bearing the appearance of a gentleman in dress and manners, purchases property from you, and with "fair pretences" obtains your confidence. You find, when he has left, that he paid you with counterfeit bank-notes, or a forged draft. This man is justly called a "forger," or "counterfeiter;" and if arrested, he is punished as such; but nobody thinks of calling him a "humbug."

A respectable-looking man sits by your side in an omnibus or rail-car. He converses fluently, and is evidently a man of intelligence and reading. He attracts your attention by his "fair pretences." Arriving at your journey's end, you miss your watch and your pocket-book. Your fellow-passenger proves to be the thief. Everybody calls him a "pickpocket," and not withstanding his "fair pretences," not a person in the community calls him a "humbug."

Two actors appear as stars at two rival theatres. They are equally talented, equally pleasing. One advertises himself simply as a tragedian, under his proper

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name—the other boasts that he is a prince, and wears decorations presented by all the potentates of the world, including the “King of the Cannibal Islands.” He is correctly set down as a “humbug,” while this term is never applied to the other actor. But if the man who boasts of having received a foreign title is a miserable actor, and he gets up gift-enterprises and bogus entertainments, or pretends to devote the proceeds of his tragic efforts to some charitable object, without, in fact, doing so—he is then a humbug in Dr. Webster’s sense of that word, for he is an “impostor under fair pretences.”

Two physicians reside in one of our fashionable avenues. They were both educated in the best medical colleges; each has passed an examination, received his diploma, and been dubbed an M.D. They are equally skilled in the healing art. One rides quietly about the city in his gig or brougham, visiting his patients without noise or clamour—the other sallies out in his coach-and-four, preceded by a band of music, and his carriage and horses are covered with handbills and placards, announcing his “wonderful cures.” This man is properly called a quack and a humbug. Why? Not because he cheats or imposes upon the public, for he does not, but because, as generally understood, “humbug” consists in putting on glittering appearances—outside show—novel expedients, by which to suddenly arrest public attention, and attract the public eye and ear.

Clergymen, lawyers, or physicians, who should resort to such methods of attracting the public, would not, for obvious reasons, be apt to succeed. Bankers, insurance-agents, and others, who aspire to become the custodians of the money of their fellow-men, would require a different species of advertising from this; but there are various trades and occupations which need only notoriety to insure success, always provided that when customers are once attracted, they never fail to get their money’s worth. An honest man who thus arrests public attention will be called a “humbug,” but

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he is not a swindler or an impostor. If, however, after attracting crowds of customers by his unique displays, a man foolishly fails to give them a full equivalent for their money, they never patronize him a second time, but they very properly denounce him as a swindler, a cheat, an impostor; they do not, however, call him a "humbug." He fails, not because he advertises his wares in an *outré* manner, but because, after attracting crowds of patrons, he stupidly and wickedly cheats them.

When the great blacking-maker of London despatched his agent to Egypt to write on the pyramids of Ghiza, in huge letters, "Buy Warren's Blacking, 30, Strand, London," he was not "cheating" travellers upon the Nile. His blacking was really a superior article, and well worth the price charged for it, but he was "humbugging" the public by this queer way of arresting attention. It turned out just as he anticipated, that English travellers in that part of Egypt were indignant at this desecration, and they wrote back to the London *Times* (every Englishman writes or threatens to "write to the *Times*," if anything goes wrong), denouncing the "Goth" who had thus disfigured these ancient pyramids by writing on them, in monstrous letters, "Buy Warren's Blacking, 30, Strand, London." The *Times* published these letters, and backed them up by several of those awful, grand, and dictatorial editorials peculiar to the great "Thunderer," in which the blacking-maker, "Warren, 30, Strand," was stigmatized as a man who had no respect for the ancient patriarchs, and it was hinted that he would probably not hesitate to sell his blacking on the sarcophagus of Pharaoh, "or any other" mummy,—if he could only make money by it. In fact, to cap the climax, Warren was denounced as a "humbug." These indignant articles were copied into all the provincial journals, and very soon, in this manner, the columns of every newspaper in Great Britain were teeming with this advice: "Try Warren's Blacking, 30, Strand, London." The curiosity of the public was thus aroused,

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and they did "try" it, and finding it a superior article, they continued to purchase it and recommend it to their friends, and Warren made a fortune by it. He always attributed his success to his having "humbugged" the public by this unique method of advertising his blacking in Egypt! But Warren did not cheat his customers, nor practise "an imposition under fair pretences." He was a humbug, but he was an honest, upright man, and no one called him an impostor or a cheat.

When the tickets for Jenny Lind's first concert in America were sold at auction, several business-men, aspiring to notoriety, "bid high" for the first ticket. It was finally knocked down to "Genin, the hatter," for \$225. The journals in Portland (Maine) and Houston (Texas), and all other journals throughout the United States, between these two cities, which were connected with the telegraph, announced the fact in their columns the next morning. Probably two millions of readers read the announcement, and asked, "Who is Genin, the hatter?" Genin became famous in a day. Every man involuntarily examined his hat, to see if it was made by Genin; and an Iowa editor declared that one of his neighbours discovered the name of Genin in his old hat, and immediately announced the fact to his neighbours in front of the Post-office. It was suggested that the old hat should be sold at auction. It was done then and there, and the Genin hat sold for fourteen dollars! Gentlemen from city and country rushed to Genin's store to buy their hats, many of them willing to pay even an extra dollar, if necessary, provided they could get a glimpse of Genin himself. This singular freak put thousands of dollars into the pocket of "Genin, the hatter," and yet I never heard it charged that he made poor hats, or that he would be guilty of an "imposition under fair pretences." On the contrary, he is a gentleman of probity, and of the first respectability.

When the laying of the Atlantic Telegraph was nearly completed I was in Liverpool. I offered the