

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-108-04435-6 - The Humbugs of the World  
P.T. Barnum  
Frontmatter  
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Ebenezer Scrooge's cry of 'Humbug!' is well known throughout the English-speaking world. But what did he mean? In this entertaining book, P.T. Barnum (1810–91) defines 'humbug' as 'glittering appearances by which to suddenly arrest public attention, and attract the public eye and ear'. A showman himself and the creator of 'The Greatest Show on Earth', Barnum was famous for his own tricks, and describes here some of the most fascinating and outrageous examples perpetrated in his time. He explores the cases of Mr Warren, who wrote an advertisement in enormous letters on the pyramids of Giza, and the Fox daughters, who caused a stir among spiritualists in New York when they held seances with tapping spirits – in fact their own cracking knee joints. First published in 1866, this tour of Victorian humbug, fraud, superstition and quackery will appeal to social historians and readers interested in nineteenth-century popular culture.

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# The Humbugs of the World

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**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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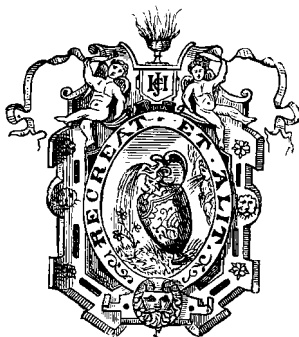
THE  
  
Humbugs of the World.

BY  
  
P. T. BARNUM.

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

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### PUBLISHER'S NOTE.

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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

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*Publisher's Note.*

to demonstrate that the qualities that have placed him in his present position of notoriety and affluence would, in another pursuit, have raised him to far greater eminence. In his breadth of views, his profound knowledge of mankind, his courage under reverses, his indomitable perseverance, his ready eloquence, and his admirable business tact, may be recognised the elements that are conducive to success in most other pursuits.

## INTRODUCTION.

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IN the "Autobiography of P. T. Barnum," published in 1855, I partly promised to write a book which should expose several of the chief humbugs of the world. The invitation of some friends induced me to write a series of articles, in which I very naturally took up the subject in question. This book is a revision and re-arrangement of a portion of those articles. If I should find that I have met a popular demand, I shall in due time put forth a second volume. There is not the least danger of a dearth of materials.

I once travelled through the Southern States in company with a magician. The first day in each town he astonished his auditors with his deceptions. He then announced that on the following day he would show how each trick was performed, and how every man might thus become his own magician. The *exposé* spoiled the legerdemain market, on that particular route, for several years. So, if we could have a full exposure of "the tricks of trade" of all sorts, of humbugs and deceivers of past times, religious, political, financial, scientific, quackish, and so forth, we might perhaps look for a somewhat wiser generation to follow us. I shall be well satisfied if I can do something towards so good a purpose.

P. T. BARNUM.