

12-1-1927

Comment

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Recommended Citation

Briggs, John E. "Comment." *The Palimpsest* 8 (1927), 414-416.

Available at: <https://ir.uiowa.edu/palimpsest/vol8/iss12/4>

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Comment by the Editor

NAPOLEONS OF PUBLICITY

P. T. Barnum was one of the world's ablest salesmen: Henry Ford is the other one. Barnum sold entertainment, while Ford markets pleasure. Where can you find a parallel in the history of human achievement for the public interest that has been aroused by the production of the new Ford motor car? The discovery of America was never a topic of general conversation. Only a few politicians were much concerned about the adoption of the Constitution. Neither the conquest of malaria nor the invention of the gasoline engine produced any immediate impression on the interest of mankind. Yet the announcement of a new-model automobile has almost revolutionized American thought.

For months it has been the standard subject of casual comment. Like the weather (which has been seriously neglected of late), everybody has talked about it and no one has had the temerity to challenge the wildest rumor. Detroit and "sources close to Mr. Ford" have displaced California as the fiction center of the world. Captains of industry have not been able to keep their thoughts on important matters like the tariff and the immortality of the soul, and people who never had a thought about anything

in their lives have nearly wrecked their minds speculating about the new Ford.

The suspense of waiting has been a terrible strain on the nation; yet the ordeal has apparently only begun. Now that every one and his wife have actually seen the marvel of motordom they can't wait till their order is filled. But dealers have already quit accepting orders. If the demand continues, a customer will soon need two character witnesses and a letter from his Congressman before they will even take his name and address. The Presidential candidate who promises to grapple with the problem of the disposition of useless model Ts will be likely to sweep the country.

How the "Prince of Humbugs" would have envied the "Wizard of Industry"! Like Ford he capitalized curiosity, but unlike the present champion he watered his stock with guile. Both men have exploited human nature, though their methods differ. Ford accomplishes his purpose quietly, with the finesse of a magician: Barnum kept the public in a fever of excitement with a megaphone and fireworks. Ford's success is built on the firm foundation of popular faith, while Barnum made an axiom of his hypothesis that suckers are born every minute. The results are much the same in either case — the stimulation of imagination, the creation of wants, the elevation of the standard of living, the promotion of civilization. Remember that it was Barnum who

brought the "Swedish Nightingale" to America and thereby improved American taste for music.

The stock in trade of the world's greatest showman was humbug; but he handled the bunk magnificently, frankly, and without unction. As a propagandist he might have won the war single-handed. He did big things in a big way. Kings, queens, and literary celebrities he met on a common plane. Among his fellow citizens he was the embodiment of the Yankee type — just as indigenious as the Fourth of July. He fought his way up from poverty to riches, knew defeat and faced it manfully, won and lost with equal composure, played the game to the hazard of his last chip and, if adversity came, never whimpered but began again. He had the initiative of genius. His reputation circled the world and still lingers in the corridors of fame. A half century has elapsed since the height of his pyrotechnic glory, yet the spirit of Barnum is still abroad and the kingdom of suckerdome to which he gave proverbial continuity still flourishes.

J. E. B.