REVELATIONS OF A SHOWMAN.

WE have often regretted that the inimitable author of Gil Blas has not Siven us, in his entertaining volumes, a minute and detailed biography of t hat ingenious personage, Ambrose de Lamela. He appears but too rarely In the pages of that excellent romance, and we are rather tantalised than satisfied by the glimpses which we are permitted to obtain. Rigid persons nay object to certain of his actions as Slightly latitudinarian, but we are left In no doubt as to his principles. From some unexplained confusion in his ideas, he decamped with his master's portmanteau two days after entering his service, he had previously made a visit to church, "where he rad been, to return thanks to beaven For having preserved him from all evil accidents on the road from Burgos even unto Valladolid." A little later, we find him levying contributions on the country, in the disguise of an ab-Staining anchorite; next, he puts on the garments of an Inquisitor, and makes free with the ducats of a Jew; afterwards, being convinced of the iniquity of cheating, he becomes a Carthusian monk, and is advanced to at place of trust in the convent; and **Tinally**, towards the close of the romance, we find him, in consequence of at relapse from the ways of virtue, walking in procession to the pile as one of the victims of an auto da fe. To this sad fate, Le Sage, though by momeans the most austere of moralists, t hought fit to condemn his pattern of the hypocritical rogue; nor, though we admit the ingenuity of Ambrose, and are vastly tickled by the account of his depredations—though we admire his dexterity in gulling the public, and acknowledge the aptitude of the means which he employed—can we find fault with the author for his measure of retributory justice. On the contrary, we should have felt rather shocked had we been compelled to take leave of Ambrose in the character of a grandee and millionaire, enriched by the proceeds of his swind-

ling, and maintaining a considerable position in society, on account of the wealth amassed by such very equivo-

cal proceedings.

It is, we think, a most desirable thing, that in all works of fiction, whether high or low, there should be a distinct development of the Nemesis, or retributive power—that vice or fraud, however exhibited, should not be portrayed as finally triumphant but that each action, according to its merit or demerit, should have its proper moral consequence, and produce its legitimate effect. What interest could any of us find in Bluebeard, if popular tradition had allowed old Indigo to chop off Fatima's head, to hurl the screaming sister Ann from the heights of the bartisan, and to impale the avenging brothers on the stake? Is it not an immense relief to our feelings when, in the concluding act of the melodrama, Jack, who is supposed to be far away at sea, perhaps whitening the corals of the Pacific Ocean with his bones, darts upon the stage all alive and hearty, at precisely the right nick of time, and scores with his cutlass the skull of that villanous smuggler, who, after having impugned his fidelity, is now proceeding to take liberties with the disconsolate and despairing Poll? Rely upon it, there is a fine moral stratum at the base of the popular heart. Even thieves and housebreakers will admit that the reputation of Jack Sheppard would have been lessened, and the professional glories of David Haggart have been dimmed, had not these illustrious individuals consummated their career We cannot do upon the gallows. without our moral. Some of the dramatists, such as Beaumont and Fletcher, Dryden, Congreve, and others, attempted to reverse the rule, and to exhibit vice as triumphant. Posterity has righteously judged them for their offence, and has dismissed them with ineffable disgust to a limbo from which there is no return.

Passing from the domain of fiction,

The Life of P. T. Barnum. Written by Himself. London: Sampson Low, Sor, & Co. 1855.

procession returned to Danbury. The utmost harmony and unanimity of feeling prevailed throughout the day, and we are happy to add that no accident occurred to mar the festivities of the occasion."

What were the triumphs of Scipio Africanus, of Pompey, and of Cæsar, compared with the ovation of Barnum?

Of course, a man who had received, and, as he tells us, merited such honours, could not be expected to confine himself for the rest of his life to dealing in paltry traffickings in wooden nutmegs, or the sale of pocket-books, combs, beads, cheap finger-rings, and "stewed oysters." He acknowledges that his mercantile business did not thrive; and we are not surprised at the confession. In 1835, he commenced his real career. His first speculation was of the following kind:—

"In the latter part of July 1835, Mr Coley Bartram, of Reading, Ct., and at present a resident of the same State, called at our store. He was acquainted with Mr Moody and myself. He informed us that he owned an interest in an extraordinary negro woman, named Joice HETH, whom he believed to be one hundred and sixty-one years of age, and whom he also believed to have been the nurse of General Washington. He had sold out his interest to his partner, R. W. Lindsay, of Jefferson county, Kentucky, who was now exhibiting her in Philadelphia, but not having much tact as a showman, he was anxious to sell out and return home.

"Mr Bartram also handed me a copy of The Pennsylvania Inquirer, of July 15, 1835, and directed my attention to the following advertisement, which I here transcribe verbatim:—

"CURIOSITY—The citizens of Philadelphia and its vicinity have an opportunity of witnessing at the Masonic Hall one of the greatest natural curiosities ever witnessed, viz., JOICE HETH, a negress, aged 161 years, who formerly belonged to the father of General Washington. She has been a member of the Baptist Church 116 years, and can rehearse many hymns, and sing them according to former custom. She was born near the old Potomac river in Virginia, and has for 90 or 100 years lived in Paris, Kentucky, with the Bowling family.

"All who have seen this extraordinary woman are satisfied of the truth of the account of her age. The evidence of the Bowling family, which is respectable, is strong, but the original bill of sale of Augustine Washington, in his own handwriting, and other evidence which the proprietor has in his possession, will satisfy even the most incredulous.

"A lady will attend at the hall during the afternoon and evening for the accommodation of those ladies who may call.

"The New York newspapers had al-

ready furnished descriptions of this wonderful personage; and becoming considerably excited upon the subject, I proceeded at once to Philadelphia, and had an interview with Lindsay at the Masonic Hall.

" I was favourably struck with the appearance of the old woman. So far as outward indications were concerned, she might almost as well have been called a thousand years old as any other age. She was lying upon a high lounge in the middle of the room; her lower extremities were drawn up, with her knees elevated some two feet above the top of the lounge. She was apparently in good health and spirits, but former disease or old age, or perhaps both combined, had rendered her unable to change her position; in fact, although she could move one of her arms at will, her lower limbs were fixed in their position, and could not be straightened. She was totally blind, and her eyes were so deeply sunken in their sockets that the eyeballs seemed to have disappeared altogether. She had no teeth, but possessed a head of thick bushy grey hair. Her left arm lay across her breast, and she had no power to remove it. The fingers of her left hand were drawn down so as nearly to close it, and remained fixed and immovable. The nails upon that hand were about four inches in length, and extended above her wrist. The nails upon her large toes also had grown to the thickness of nearly a quarter of an inch.

"She was very sociable, and would talk almost incessantly so long as visitors would converse with her. She sang a variety of ancient hymns, and was very garrulous when speaking of her protégé dear little George,' as she termed the great father of our country. She declared that she was present at his birth, that she was formerly the slave of Augustine Washington, the father of George, and that she was the first person who put 'In fact,' said Joice, clothes upon him. and it was a favourite expression of hers, 'I raised him.' She related many interesting anecdotes of 'her dear little George;' and this, mixed with her conversations upon religious subjects — for she claimed to be a member of the Baptist Church—rendered her exhibition an extremely interesting one."

We give the passage entire, in order that our readers may understand what kind of exhibitions are popular in America. Supposing the story to be true, though even Barnum does not affect to believe it, here is a miserable old object, scarce better than an ani-

mated corpse, sold, at the age of 161, to be hawked about the country, for the gain of the exhibitors. Mrs Stowe, in her famous novel, has brought forward nothing so hideously repulsive; and we are satisfied that, had she narrated such a story in her book, one-half of her European readers would have thrown it down with an impatient exclamation of incredulity. But old as she was, Joice Heth appeared to Barnum capable of the production of many dollars. He sold all that he had, and even borrowed; but in the end became the proprietor of this unhappy being for the sum of one thousand dollars, engaged a certain lawyer, Mr Levi Lyman—no inappropriate name—as an assistant in exhibiting, and set the press to work.

The exhibition, for a time, proved very profitable, as the old woman was made to sing a succession of Baptist hymns; but when it began to fail, the adroit Barnum was ready with a new stimulant for the public curiosity.

Here it is:—

"When the audiences began to decrease in numbers, a short communication appeared in one of the newspapers, signed A Visitor,' in which the writer claimed to have made an important discovery. He stated that Joice Heth, as at present exhibited, was a humbug, whereas, if the simple truth was told in regard to the exhibition, it was really vastly curious and interesting. 'The fact is,' said the communication, 'Joice Heth is not a human being. What purports to be a remarkably old woman is simply a curiouslyconstructed automaton, made up of whalebone, india-rubber, and numberless springs ingeniously put together, and made to move at the slightest touch, according to the will of the operator. The exhibitor is a ventriloquist, and all the conversations apparently held with the ancient lady are purely imaginary, so far as she is concerned, for the answers and incidents purporting to be given and related by her, are merely the ventriloquial voice of the exhibitor.'

"Maelzel's ingenious mechanism somewhat prepared the way for this announcement, and hundreds who had not visited Joice Heth were now anxious to see the curious automaton; while many who had seen her were equally desirous of a second look, in order to determine whether or not they had been deceived. The consequence was, our audiences again largely increased." The success of this expedient, "dodge," or whatever else it may be called, was so marked, that it was necessary to curtail the psalmody of Joice. It is impossible not to recognise the candour of the following avowal:—

"We hastened our return to New York to fill a second engagement I had made with Mr Niblo. The American Institute held its annual Fair at his garden, and my engagement was to commence at the same time. The great influx of visitors to the Fair caused our room to be continually crowded, insomuch that we were frequently compelled to announce to applicants that the hall was full, and no more could be admitted for the present. In those cases we would hurry up the exhibitions, cut short a hymn or two, answer questions with great rapidity, and politely open the front door as an egress to visitors, at the same time opening the entrance from the garden for the ingress of fresh customers."

Sorry are we to say, that the outrages upon the old negress did not end even with her death. She expired a few months after Barnum bought her, and the dissection of the body gave rise to a controversy touching her age: in the course of which controversy, Lyman, Barnum's assistant, stated to the editor of a newspaper, with a view to publication, that the whole history and the years of Joice Heth was the invention of his employer; that Barnum had found the negress in the outhouse of a plantation in Kentucky, extracted her teeth, and instructed her in the Washington story.

Mark the impudence of the following remark on the part of the moral Barnum! He had been accused by the editor of a leading newspaper, upon the information of his own assistant, not only of having perpetrated a gross imposture upon the public, but of having used brutal cruelty on the person of an old woman, to give her the appearance of a perfectly fabulous age. He was so far from manifesting any resentment towards his assistant, that he continued him in his employment until Lyman became a Mormonite, and removed to Nauvoo. And so little desirous was he of wishing the American public to understand that, in his first essay at showmanship, he had acted in good faith, that he now says:---

"The story of Lyman has since been generally accredited as the true history of the old negress, and never, until the present writing, have I said or written a word by way of contradiction or correction. Newspaper and social controversy on the subject (and seldom have vastly more important matters been so largely discussed) served my purpose as 'a showman,' by keeping my name before the public."

What does this amount to, but an assertion that, in America at least, it is better to be accounted a clever Again rascal than an honest man? we repeat, that this is a matter for the Americans to take up. It is for them to decide whether Barnum has libelled his countrymen, or whether the general moral tone prevalent on the other side of the Atlantic is such as he insinuates it to be. For Barnum's pretensions are very large. He represents himself now, not only as opulent, but as being a man of high consideration; and he attributes his position to practices inconsistent with common honesty. Is he right or is he wrong in his estimate? We cannot say. Impudence like this baffles speculation; and we must leave him to the

judgment of his countrymen.

"Aunt Joice" being evidently not likely to last long, whether her age was 160, or only the half of it, Barnum, with his usual prudence, looked out for a novelty to take her place, and pitched upon a certain platespinner, or mountebank, called Antonio—a very poor Italian snake, no better than the half-nude acrobats who are permitted, by the negligence of the police, occasionally to infest our streets-whom, having got thoroughly washed, he dignified by the name of Signor Vivalla. This signor could balance guns upon his nose, walk on stilts, and perform various of the feats which are now only astonishing to the most remote of our agricultural But they were quite new population. when Barnum engaged him, and might possibly, as feats, have drawn a dollar or two per night for their exhibition, after all the expenses were paid. Not much more assuredly; but the acute Barnum saw his opportunity. A native professor of gymnastics had a strong party, and, when Vivalla first appeared, that professor had collected a sibilant audience. Immediately Barnum took his line. challenged, in the name of the great Vivalla, any native performer to compete with him on the stage, for a wager of a thousand dollars, and, that being accepted by the American acrobat Roberts, rashly, and in such a way as must have led to his forfeiture of the stake, Barnum brought the two men together, made the show, and reaped the advantage, as long as it would pay, of the seeming competition between the American and Ita-That Barnum should lian artists. have engaged in such petty frauds is not surprising; our only wonder is at the apparent complacency of his revelations.

Yet, notwithstanding all his "dodges," Barnum was for a long time unsuccessful. In fact, he was so far from making a fortune in America, that in 1841 he became, as he candidly admits, "about as poor as I should ever wish to be. I looked around in vain for employment congenial to my feelings, that would serve to keep my head above water."

His first decided hit was the purchase of the American museum, New York, a transaction which he contrived to carry through upon credit. This emporium of delights is not to be classed with the collections of specimens of natural history and antiquities which are to be found in most large cities. It was, and we presume is, a gigantic congregation of shows of all kinds, as may be gathered from the following description of it by the spirited proprietor:—

"Industrious fleas, educated dogs, jugglers, automatons, ventriloquists, living statuary, tableaux, gypsies, albinoes, fat boys, giants, dwarfs, rope-dancers, caricatures of phrenology, and 'live Yankees,' pantomime, instrumental music, singing and dancing in great variety (including Ethiopians), etc. Dioramas, panoramas, models of Dublin, Paris, Niagara, Jerusalem, etc., mechanical figures, fancy glass-blowing, knitting machines and other triumphs in the mechanical arts, dissolving views, American Indians, including their warlike and religious ceremonies enacted on the stage, etc., etc.

"I need not specify the order of time in which these varieties were presented to the public. In one respect there has been a thorough though gradual change in the general plan, for the moral drama is now, and has been for several years, the principal feature of the Lecture Room of the American Museum.

" Apart from the merit and interest of these performances, and apart from everything connected with the stage, my permanent collection of curiosities is, without doubt, abundantly worth the uniform charge of admission to all the entertainments of the establishment, and I can therefore afford to be accused of 'humbug' when I add such transient novelties as increase its attractions. If I have exhibited a questionable dead mermaid in my Museum, it should not be overlooked that I have also exhibited cameleopards, a rhinoceros, grisly bears, ourang-outangs, great serpents, etc., about which there could be no mistake, because they were alive; and I hope that a little 'claptrap ' occasionally, in the way of transparencies, flags, exaggerated pictures, and puffing advertisements, might find an offset in a wilderness of wonderful, instructive, and amusing realities. Indeed, I cannot doubt that the sort of 'clap-trap' here referred to is allowable, and that the public like a little of it mixed up with the great realities which I provide. The titles of 'humbug,' and the 'prince of humbugs,' were first applied to me by myself."

The story of the mermaid is rather a curious onc. It was, says Barnum, "an ugly, dried-up, black-looking, and diminutive specimen, about three feet long. Its mouth was open, its tail turned over, and its arms thrown up, giving it the appearance of having died in great agony." This interesting exile from the bowers of Amphitrite was in reality neither more nor less than an ingenious manufacture, composed of the head, body, and arms of an ape, and the tail of a fish, and was said to have been brought from Japan. An ordinary showman would probably have rejected it as little likely to prove attractive: Barnum, however, saw his way at once, and hired it for his museum. The first thing was to set the press to work, and the puff preliminary was administered in the following fashion:—

"In due time a communication appeared in the New York Herald, dated and mailed in Montgomery, Ala., giving the news of the day, trade, the crops, political gossip, etc., and also an incidental para-

graph about a certain Dr Griffin, agent of the Lyceum of Natural History in London, recently from Pernambuco, who had in his possession a most remarkable curiosity, being nothing less than a veritable mermaid taken among the Fejee Islands, and preserved in China, where the doctor had bought it at a high figure for the Lyceum of Natural History.

"A week or ten days afterwards, a letter of similar tenor, dated and mailed in Charleston, S. C., varying of course in the items of local news, was published in

another New York paper.

"This was followed by a third letter, dated and mailed in Washington city, published in still another New York paper—there being in addition the expressed hope that the editors of the Empire City would beg a sight of the extraordinary curiosity before Dr Griffin took ship for England."

Flinty indeed would have been the heart of "Dr Griffin," had he resisted such appeals; and accordingly a gentleman, bearing that fabulous name, in due time appeared at one of the principal hotels in Philadelphia, where "his gentlemanly, dignified, yet social manners and liberality, gained him a fine reputation." Previous to taking his departure, he indulged the landlord and a few select friends with a view of the remarkable phenomenon in his possession; and this fact being duly chronicled in the Philadelphia papers, naturally excited considerable curiosity in New York. Now, who was "Dr Griffin of Pernambuco?" Even thesametrusty Levi Lyman, who acted as Barnum's assistant in the disgusting exhibition of Joice Heth, and in consequence of whose communications to the newspapers, his employer had been accused both of imposture and cruelty!

This fraud was rather successful. Barnum prepared woodcuts of most enticing nereids, and got them inserted in the newspapers. He had transparences painted, and hung out gigantic flags with such exaggerated pictures upon them, that even Lyman experienced the unusual sensation of shame, and threatened to strike work and abscond, if the energetic Barnum did not draw it a little milder. How the American public could tolerate such a piece of impudent imposture is

to us incomprehensible.

The mermaid, however, could not be