THE BOOK OF THE MONTH

GAMALIEL BRADFORD'S "DAMAGED SOULS"

By William Lyon Phelps

Professor Phelps's review is the seventh of a series of longer book reviews to be published each month in THE BOOKMAN. *The books discussed will not necessarily be new nor will they be books which have never before been reviewed in the magazine. The aim of the editors is to present, in the selection of volumes and reviewers, articles which shall constitute solid pieces of criticism.*

GAMALIEL BRADFORD has fairly won his way to the head of the biographical essayists of America. He has all the necessary qualities, and nearly all the desirable ones except genius. He has learning, patience, humor, sympathy, and knows the difference between right and wrong. He is a student of political history and of human nature, and is profoundly and continuously interested in both. He writes with immense gusto. He forgets himself. There is no attempt at irony for the sake of irony, no thrusting of his own talents in the reader's face. He selects his models because he finds something irresistible in them, and endeavors to make us see wherein the fascination lies.

"Damaged Souls" is a good book, one that will add to the enjoyment of the intelligent reader, and to the author's reputation. These are not damned, but *damaged* souls; or at least we shall not find out whether or not they are damned until we join them. There are plenty of people in hell who would not consider these seven deadly sinners beneath their own social position. Caponsacchi said that Judas Iscariot had lived alone in hell for seventeen hundred years, because there was not a person there who would condescend to speak to him. Then, when Guido Francheschini arrived, Judas, turning around at the "prize of a footfall", showed a face made monstrous by solitude. He and Guido recognized instantly that they were kindred spirits and spent eternity as hell chums.

The seven that Gamaliel Bradford has selected are Benedict Arnold, Thomas Paine, Aaron Burr, John Randolph, John Brown, P. T. Barnum, and Ben Butler. Of these the nearest to damnation is probably Benedict Arnold, although Lytton Strachey would insist that his namesake of Rugby had done more harm. Arnold is damned, like an ill roasted egg, all on one side. On the other hand, modern liberal clergymen would exalt Tom Paine as a saint, and many Yankees would do the same for old John Brown. I believe that both of them stand nearer the torment than P. T. Barnum, on whose garments I can detect no smell of flame. It would be a particularly bad joke if Barnum were damned; he who proclaimed his Universalist faith in the teeth of Calvinistic Connecticut. Many practical jokes were played on Barnum during his lifetime, but this final one would be a bit thick.

Of the immortal seven, by merit raised to a bad eminence, the least interesting is Benjamin Franklin Butler, because he is the only one of the seven who was truly vulgar. Barnum

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was saved from vulgarity by his marvelous *bonhomie*, his unfailing high spirits, and his constant, keen, rapturous appreciation of the fact that vulgarity was exactly what the people wanted; he carried it to them by the carload. A man who is delightedly conscious of the efficiency of vulgarity, cannot, in the last analysis, be vulgar himself. Furthermore, the majority of the motion pictures of today, and nearly all the musical comedies, both of which forms of entertainment attract in the present year of grace thousands of the "best people", are so impressively more vulgar than anything in Barnum's circuses, that it will not do to hurl that accusation against the showman.

Not a single one of these men would have admitted that he was a great sinner, whereas Jonathan Edwards would not for a moment have denied it. These seven were very fond of themselves, and like nearly all of the sons and daughters of men, they ate, and wiped their mouths, and said, "I have done no wickedness." They could always find reasons in advance for doing whatever they wanted to, and reasons afterward for justification. Very few individuals are like Shakespeare's Richard, who soliloquized, "I am determined to prove a villain." Regarding men in the mass, it is difficult to overestimate either their stupidity or their conceit.

Gamaliel Bradford finds, as every honest biographer and every acute lawyer finds, that human testimony has little, if any, objective value. It is impossible to discover the truth. Testimony is good only for subjective purposes; it is a revelation, not of the criminal, but of the witness. The recoil of the gun is greater than the discharge. We know today that few books on Russia or on Ireland have any high percentage of truth, or really tell us much that can be trusted; and always, before beginning to read such a book, we wish to know on which side is the author. Then it is usually not necessary to read the book at all, any more than it is necessary to read book reviews in radical or in conservative journals, for we know perfectly well what they will say. Human testimony is delightful to all who love to watch the human comedy, because it makes such interesting fiction.

Gamaliel Bradford has done his best with his tangled mass of material, with letters, documents, confessions, autobiographies, family testimonials, and so on. All of these seven were loved by someone, and the loyalty of the wives of Arnold and Butler is beautiful and refreshing. Just as loyalty is one of the most admired of all virtues, and patriotism the only universal religion known to man — so powerful and all compelling that in the world war the churches simply followed the flag, whatever flag it happened to be — so a man who sells his country for cash is as detestable an object as can well be found. Arnold had previously shown many fine qualities. There can be little doubt that his vanity, not sufficiently fed by the Continental Congress, was the real cause of his otherwise inexplicable wrong-about-face.

John Randolph was sick in the head, *krank im Kopfe*. He just missed having a wonderfully happy life. A man of brilliant gifts, made for the adventures of parliamentary life and for the exciting pleasures of social intercourse, his career, his happiness, his mind were all eventually ruined by a cursed disposition, that grew by what it fed on, and destroyed him. He had a worm which dieth not. John Brown was a fanatic: nothing in his

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life became him like the leaving of it. The Southerners should have laughed at his scheme, and turned him loose! Had they done so, his soul would never have got such a fine start. The moment you attempt to suppress fanaticism by violence, that moment you add enormously to its power. The soul of John Brown was an imponderable asset to the Northern troops, worth many generals and many battalions. Emerson said John Brown had made the gallows as venerable as the cross; a remark which disgusted the cool Hawthorne, who commented, "No one was ever more justly hanged." It seems strange that in this essay Mr. Bradford says, "Emerson was not an enthusiast, Thoreau was not, Theodore Parker was not." I think all three were enthusiasts.

I am also rather surprised to see Mr. Bradford saying of Barnum, "if he lingers in history at all, or in the memory of his American fellow-countrymen." He seems to me as sure of immortality as the other six damaged souls. Barnum forgotten?

The illustrations which embellish the book are decidedly interesting. There's no art to find the mind's construction in the face, but these pictures are bound to make one pause and look again.

Damaged Souls. By Gamaliel Bradford. Houghton Mifflin Co.

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