

**BARNUM'S PARNASSUS: BEING
CONFIDENTIAL DISCLOSURES
OF THE PRIZE COMMITTEE ON
THE JENNY LIND SONG**

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Barnum's Parnassus: Being Confidential Disclosures of the Prize Committee on the Jenny Lind Song by William Allen Butler

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WILLIAM ALLEN BUTLER

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BARNUM'S PARNASSUS;

BEING

Confidential Disclosures

OF THE

**PRIZE COMMITTEE ON THE JENNY LIND
SONG.**

WITH SPECIMENS OF

THE LEADING AMERICAN POETS IN THE HAPPIEST
EFFULGENCE OF THEIR GENIUS.

Respectfully Dedicated to the American Eagle.

SECOND EDITION.

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D. APPLETON & COMPANY, 200 BROADWAY.

PHILADELPHIA:

GEO. S. APPLETON, 164 CHESTNUT-STREET.

1850.

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BARNUM'S PARNASSUS.

THE Prize Committee expects to be aspersed and anticipates nothing but calumny. Publics as well as Republics are ungrateful. Poets especially are a most "*irritable genus*." A great author has very profoundly remarked, that

"Great wits are sure to madness near allied,"

and the Prize Committee expects that a great many American Poets will be very mad indeed when they hear the decision of the Committee. No allowances will be made (the allowances of champagne and cigars by Mr. Barnum are not referred to) for the embarrassing position of the Prize Committee. No regard will be had by the disappointed competitors and their dear friends to the peculiar delicacy of the task of the Prize Committee. The Prize Committee felt this the moment it assumed its responsible duties.

It foresaw its destiny, and beheld (terrible vision!) the whole tribe of American Poets and Poetesses, with their eyes, as usual, in a fine frenzy rolling, scowling vengeance upon the Prize Committee and the successful Songster, and handing their names down to posterity in bad heroics or vindictive blank verse. The Prize Committee would willingly have escaped this dire necessity. It would gladly have shifted upon other shoulders the load which it—the Atlas of American Song—was compelled to bear. But the Prize Committee did not shrink. It faced the perils of its position. It came, saw, read, and selected. How, and in what manner, the ungenerous public will learn. The Prize Committee intends to unbosom itself. It intends to report confidentially to the whole community, and to solve the great question whether the world will stand by the Prize Committee, or the Prize Committee must stand by itself.

It is *not true* that the Prize Committee put the songs in its pockets as fast as received, and carried them about to Clark and Brown's, Windust's, Delmonico's, or wherever the Prize Committee happened to go, for the purpose of asking the decision of its friends upon their merits. Every song had equal and even-handed justice. A hog'shead, the same in which the original Mermaid :

er first voyage from Vermont to New-York, was appropriated to the reception of the songs. As fast as received they were deposited in its cavernous depths. The hogshead soon filled, as may be supposed, from the following report of one day's receipts.

Receipts of Songs at Box No. 2743, on Friday, Aug. 30th.

Little Rock, Wisconsin, and entire West, including new Territories and Indian Reservations,	10
Montotoe, Miss., and entire South, including 2 from Cuba,	3
Boston, East Boston, Cambridge, and suburbs, and New England in general,	241
New-York City, Brooklyn and Hoboken, and all other quarters,	337
Total,	<u>591</u>

In addition to which, a large roll of manuscript came a by express from Fredonia, Michigan, endorsed, "An American Epic,—'The Alleghaniad'—to be printed entire if adopted, but only as much sung as Miss Lind chooses."

The great disparity between the receipts from the North and East and those from the South, is a fact which the Prize Committee requests the Literati south of Mason and Dixon's Line, to put in their pipes and smoke.

The ceremony of heading up the hogshead was performed in the presence of the Prize Committee after the receipts of the mails of the 31st. The fact that the hogshead contained by that time, on a moderate calculation, about five thousand *staves*, made the operation of heading it a serious matter. Great fears of explosion were entertained by the Prize Committee, but by packing down the loose songs on the top with a few volumes of Griswold's American Poets, sufficient weight was obtained to compress the entire bulk into the requisite space. The hogshead was conveyed to the Committee Rooms.

The Prize Committee wishes to be frank and confidential. It is *not true* that the hogshead of Jenny Lind songs was insured in the sum of \$10,000 in the Phoenix or any other company, pending the decision of the Committee. No Wall-street company would take the risk. The attempt was made, but the answer to every application of the Prize Committee, was "extra hazardous," and the insurance was declined.

It is *not true* that a song was telegraphed on, on the 31st, by a Cincinnati poet who was too late for the mail. Such a proposition was made to the Committee, but indignantly declined. The poet insisted on sending on the dispatch, but it was interrupted at the tenth stanza by an unexpected rise in pork, which required to be immediately telegraphed, and was never completed.

It is *not true* that in unheading the hog'shead, a violent explosion took place, seriously wounding four of the Prize Committee men. On the contrary, the decapitation of the hog'shead was performed with entire success, and after removing the superincumbent weight above referred to, the songs were shovelled into five separate barrels, and a member of the Prize Committee assigned to each.

The gravest of questions then presented itself to the Committee. WHAT WAS TO BE DONE ?

Prize Committee man No. 1, suggested that as these songs were conclusive evidence against the two thousand perpetrators of rhyme, the principles of Military Courts Martial should be adopted, and the process of decimation resorted to; and accordingly moved that the songs be counted, and one out of every ten considered.

The great objection to this method proved to be, that no one of the Committee would undertake the task of