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Artemus Ward : The Gentle Humorist

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ARTEMUS WARD: THE GENTLE HUMORIST

By

John Raymond Pascal

A Master's Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

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A THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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by

JOHN RAYMOND PASCAL

Montclair State University

Montclair, NJ

2008

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Acknowledgements

This thesis is dedicated to

my dear parents

Sophia M. and Joseph R. Pascal

whose love of books has been a lifelong inspiration

and to

Mr. Richard Binkowski

teacher, scholar, mentor, friend.

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Abstract

It is generally accepted that during his lifetime, Mark Twain was considered the preeminent American master storyteller and lecturer of humor. The tsunami that is Twain's literary achievement can easily overwhelm the earlier vast movement of the American literary scene that led to its creation. The "underwater earthquake" of this movement is Charles Farrar Browne, but his more famous pseudonym is Artemus Ward.

While there were earlier as well as contemporary humorous writers, Artemus Ward was regarded by William Dean Howells as "the humorist who first gave the world a taste of the humor that characterizes the whole American people" (Pullen 26). In fact, New Jersey's own American novelist and short story writer Albert Payson Terhune commemorates Ward as "the man 'who taught Americans to laugh'" (Nock 9). Indeed, in 1862, President Lincoln laughed heartily while he read to his Cabinet passages from Ward's first book. Ward's uniqueness in telling a story from the lecture platform enthralled thousands throughout the United States and in Canada; he was also "the first deadpan comedian to take England by storm" (Austin, Ward 19).

Despite these views, today Ward's literary reputation is largely forgotten. Yet he was distinctive and influential in the American tradition of his day and is deserving of study. This thesis will analyze the construction of his literary reputation by showing that what made Ward so popular in his time was that his literary humor was rhetorically gentle. This is seen through his numerous fictitious letters to the Cleveland Daily Plain Dealer, Vanity Fair and reprinted largely throughout the country. The success of his humorous letters was displayed in a character that exuded confidence without conceit, and whose observations of contemporary issues contained neither sarcasm nor malice. He did not allow himself to be emotionally caught up in his humor. His satiric wit was enjoyed by all of its targets. Furthermore, Ward parlayed the success of his

nationally published letters into a commercially successful career as the first comedic lecturer to tour the nation.

In his time, Ward achieved a fascinating dichotomy with his genial humor. His letters to the Plain Dealer showed a very confident, middle-aged, pot-bellied P.T. Barnum-like character of a traveling tent show of unusual animals and wax figures, and who used humorous misspellings then in vogue to “comment” on a variety of topics. However, his lectures, billed as “Artemus Ward Speaks a Piece,” startled audiences that saw instead the real Charles Ferrar Browne, a gaunt young man of twenty-seven who dressed quite distinctively and spoke very formally in a humorous stream of consciousness with a seriousness of expression (Pullen 46).

A full appreciation of Ward’s humor requires this thesis to be divided into three parts, with Parts II and III being the bulk. Part I will be extremely brief, though necessary in the construction of his literary reputation in his short life of thirty-three years, solely as it developed and influenced his humor. This part’s focus will be on historically pertinent references to the native American humor as it affected his humor during his lifetime.

During his lifetime, Ward wrote Artemus Ward, His Book (1862) and Artemus Ward: His Travels (1865). His executors published three works posthumously: Artemus Ward in London, and Other Papers (1867), Artemus Ward’s Panorama. (As exhibited at the Egyptian Hall, London) (1869), and The Complete Works of Artemus Ward, (1898). Part II will critically analyze his literary reputation in selected letters from these works and will historicize his rhetorically gentle humor that “commented” on such topics as politics, reform movements, the Civil War, and some of our various human foibles.

Part III will examine his lecture techniques as reasons for the commercial success of his humor. Ward’s innate sense of aesthetic humor was natural and was closely allied with his

extraordinary rapport with his lecture audiences (Austin, Ward 72). His success as a lecturer included the deliberate uses of “mock gravity, the look of innocent surprise when the audience laughed, the anticlimaxes, pauses, non sequiturs, and wanderings of thought” which delighted his spectators everywhere (Pullen 94). Lastly, though his humor was natural, he altered it for successful appearances on the lecture circuit through deliberate and methodical preparation in delivery.

Introduction

“There is no wit in the form of a well-rounded sentence. If I say Alexander the Great conquered the world and then sighed because *he could not do so some more*, there is a funny mixture” (Seitz 181). The author of this quote is Charles Ferrar Browne, and he knew that people laughed at him more for his “eccentric sentences than on account of the subject-matter in them” (181). His more famous pseudonym is Artemus Ward. He was the “preeminent literary comedian in America prior to Mark Twain’s emergence as a serious humorist during the 1870s and 1880s” (Sloane, Twain 29). Among the literary comedians of the Civil War era who sought financial success as well as literary recognition, Ward was uniquely a commercial success by combining “comic wit, American social ethics, and platform persona” (13).

Ward’s life was a very brief thirty-three years, stretching from his 1834 birth in Maine, his migration to Ohio, then to New York City, his lecture tours throughout the United States, Canada, and finally to London where he died of tuberculosis in 1867. Yet this life was extraordinarily significant in its journalistic and lecturing achievements. For example, William Dean Howells viewed him as “the humorist who first gave the world a taste of the humor that characterizes the whole American people” (Pullen 26). Bret Harte also called him the “American Humorist, *par excellence*” (77). Moreover, in preparing his Cabinet to receive the draft to the Emancipation Proclamation, President Lincoln laughed heartily in reading passages from Ward’s first book of letters-to-the-editor to them. Overall, Ward’s singular techniques of telling a story from the stage platform in deliberate burlesques of the informative lecture entertained thousands of diverse individuals throughout the United States. Ward then considered the ability to appear before a London audience as the apex of his career. He was the “first deadpan comedian to take England by storm” (Austin, Ward 19). Ironically, his extraordinary

success on the London stage lasted just a little over nine weeks as his tuberculosis claimed his life.

Despite these laudatory comments, today Ward's reputation is mostly forgotten. Nevertheless, due to its importance and influence in the American culture of his day, his work is deserving of study. Ward has been the subject and reference in various scholarly articles examining the growth of American humor in literature. However, in the last fifty years, only two books on Ward have been published: John J. Pullen's 1983 Comic Relief The Life and Laughter of Artemus Ward 1834-1867 and James C. Austin's 1964 Twayne's series Artemus Ward. The last dissertation that dealt principally on Ward's career is John Q. Reed's 1955 "Artemus Ward; A Critical Study."

In addition to these works being used as a frame of reference, this thesis will use the two books that Ward wrote during his lifetime: Artemus Ward, His Book (1862) and Artemus Ward; His Travels (1865). His executors published three works posthumously: Artemus Ward in London, and Other Papers (1867), Artemus Ward's Panorama. (As exhibited at the Egyptian Hall, London) (1869), and The Complete Works of Artemus Ward, (1898). These works will also be referenced. This thesis will study the construction of Ward's literary reputation by examining what made him so popular in his time—especially the fact that his literary humor was rhetorically gentle.

Ward gained his popularity because his humor was inoffensive. "His opinions, his language, and his appearance were consistently moderate and inoffensive to all" (Austin, Ward 120). His humor was delivered with neither introduction nor apology, yet without an inflated sense of self-importance (120). As Harte wrote for the Golden Era in December of 1863, Ward's humor was frank in not serving any purpose "beyond the present laugh" and "that it had no

wrongs to redress in particular, no especial abuse to attack with ridicule, no moral to point” and this quality had been understood by everyone (Pullen 76).

This aspect of his style is demonstrated in his numerous fictitious letters to the Cleveland Daily Plain Dealer and Vanity Fair. This material exists thanks to the journalistic exchange system where newspapers and periodicals all over the country were encouraged to send humorous material postage free to each other. If the material was “especially good, it would be reprinted repeatedly throughout the nation. It was thus that Artemus Ward won national fame” (Austin, Nasby 25). The success of his humorous letters was due in part to a character that displayed confidence without conceit, and whose observations of contemporary issues held neither sarcasm nor malice. He did not allow himself to be emotionally caught up in his humor, thus possibly losing his objectivity. His satiric wit was enjoyed by all of his targets. Furthermore, Ward was the first printer and journalist to parlay the success of his nationally published letters into a commercially successful career as the first comedic lecturer to tour the nation.

In his career, Ward achieved a fascinating dichotomy with his amiable humor. His letters to the Plain Dealer showed a very confident, middle-aged pot-bellied P.T. Barnum-like character of a traveling tent show of unusual animals and wax figures, one who used humorous misspellings then in vogue to “comment” on a variety of topics. Ward’s creation “heightened and condensed” the “use of American diction, rhythms, and figures of speech” (Austin, Ward 121). However, the literary allure of this figure is that he “himself mirrored the follies and foibles of our imperfect society and thus was the vehicle of a criticism that had a humanity, a good-natured acceptance, and an enduring life” (Pullen 7). Yet, his lectures, billed simply as “Artemus Ward Speaks a Piece,” startled audiences that saw the real Charles Ferrar Browne, a

very thin young man of twenty-seven who dressed most distinctively and spoke quite formally in a humorous stream of consciousness with a deliberate seriousness of expression (46).

A complete appreciation of Ward's humor allows this thesis to be divided into three parts, with Parts II and III being the majority. Part I will be very brief, though necessary, in considering the development of his literary reputation during his short life, solely as it molded and influenced his humor. The focus of this part will be on historically pertinent references to the creative American humor and journalistic practices as they affected his style.

As noted earlier, Ward wrote two books in his lifetime and three were published posthumously. Part II will critically analyze his literary reputation in selected letters from these works and will consider in their historical context the rhetorically gentle humor that "commented" on such topics as reform movements, politics and the Civil War, cults, Britain and the British, and some of the traditional various human weaknesses.

Part III will examine his lecture techniques as reasons for the commercial success of his humor. Ward's innate sense of humor was natural and was closely allied with his extraordinary rapport with his lecture audiences (Austin, Ward 72). His success included the deliberate uses of "mock gravity, the look of innocent surprise when the audience laughed, the anticlimaxes, pauses, non sequiturs, and wanderings of thought" that delighted his spectators everywhere (Pullen 94). Lastly, though his humor was natural, he modified it for successful appearances on the lecture circuit through deliberate and methodical preparation in delivery.

Ward's humor is worthy of study due to its tremendous popularity in his own time. While the earlier critical articles show how comical his humor was, they do not explain exactly why his humor was so successful. Its achievement lies in its original, gentle and mild satire. This new viewpoint is what students of American literary humor need to see. His literary importance is

acknowledged by Mark Twain who in 1880 called Ward “one of the kindest and gentlest men in the world” and described Ward’s 1863 “Babes in the Wood” lecture as the funniest thing he had ever heard (Rasmussen 504).

Ward himself gave almost no explanatory quotes to give a clear idea of his virtues and talents. That is another reason why his humor should be brought to academic light through this thesis. In stating a sense of morals through humor, what Ward did say is that humorous writers have always “borne battle for the right, with its grave truth fully in mind, with an artillery of wit, that has silenced the heavy batteries of formal discussion. They have helped the truth along without encumbering it with themselves” (Seitz 238). According to Ward, in this battle these writers have always done the most toward aiding “virtue on its pilgrimage, and the truth has found more aid from them than all the grave polemicists and solid writers that have ever spoken or written” (238). Moreover, he frankly stated, “I hope I have a right to say that I have always meant the creatures of my burlesques should stab Error and give Right a friendly push” (234).

In the search for truth in certain aspects of life and human nature, Ward’s distinctive style of humor in his letters and the success of his lectures demonstrate his literary talents in the mid-nineteenth century as deserving of study so as to be pushed into the academic daylight in the early twenty-first century.

Part I

One week after Artemus Ward's death in England in early March of 1867, an article about him entitled "Humour and Faith" appeared in the British newspaper Spectator in which its author asked philosophically about the place of humor in a person's life (Pullen 165). While its author believed that God is known through humankind's reverence and that the universe's rationality can be explained through logic, he felt that perhaps it is wise to develop an awareness of an oftentimes irrationality of our affairs that would comfortingly and appropriately explain life (165). Humor arises from the growth of a realization of life's "moral and intellectual disproportions" such that humor should have its place in a full life, "in which it would not displace the moral and spiritual nature, but serve as its framework and its foil" (165).

Considered a pure humorist in contrast to comic writers who have an axe to grind, Ward saw almost everything in a humorous light, clearly and always comically (Austin, Ward 7). For example, on his deathbed, he would not take the medicine that was prescribed for him and was gently scolded by his friend T.W. Robertson, the playwright:

"Come, come," said Robertson. "Take it, my dear fellow, just for my sake. You know I would do anything for you."

"Would you?" said Artemus, faintly grasping Tom's hand.

"I would indeed."

"Then *you* take it." (Austin, Ward 7)

He was born Charles Ferrar Browne in Waterford, Oxford County, Maine on April 26th, 1834 and died from tuberculosis while on his lecture tour in Southampton, England on March 7th, 1867. As a youth, he attended school but felt that he had "about enough education for a signboard" (Hingston, Genial Showman 54). He enjoyed traveling shows and circuses far more.

His natural humor was evident when he set up a private theatrical in playing Romeo. He forgot the words, and had to ask Juliet, in front of the audience, to hand him the book from her bosom, so that he could read that which he had to say to her (55).

Browne was thirteen when his father died, and this caused a change in the family's fortunes, so he followed his older brother Cyrus' path and became an itinerant printer. He went to Lancaster, New Hampshire to learn the printing trade at the Weekly Democrat (Abrams 60). Part of his duties included traveling the countryside collecting dues from farmers. Yet the publisher's daughter noted that Browne "would rather talk to the people and tell stories rather than collect money" (Seitz 8-9). While next working at the Norway Advertiser, he briefly attended the Norway Liberal Institute School and was the leader in its lyceum debates (10-11). His drawl not only charmed his speech, but drew large audiences as well (11). Thereafter, he was employed at several newspapers and printing offices in rural New England (Abrams 60). He set type and had "opportunities to write paragraphs" (Sloane, Twain 30).

In the summer of 1851, Browne became a compositor for three years at Boston's Carpet Bag and it was here that he met several influences that developed his art (Pullen 21). The Carpet Bag was a weekly comic magazine edited by Benjamin P. Shillaber, "the famous creator of Mrs. Partington and her family" (Reed 9). While her very popular stories and sayings were appearing in this magazine as an "American Mrs. Malaprop," it was Shillaber who had a direct influence on Browne's developing humor (Pullen 21). He maintained that the newspaper's purpose was "to promote cheerfulness" among its readers (Abrams 60). While this is a simple and important thought, it is one that did not take on much importance in the United States until the early nineteenth century (Pullen 21). When Browne was a boy, most standard literary works did not have humor for its own sake, rather more as part of satiric characterization (21-22). He adopted

Shillaber's philosophy of humor. Indeed, the manager of his later lecture tours, Edward P. Hingston, wrote of Browne that "to make people laugh was to be his primary endeavor . . . He believed in laughter as thoroughly wholesome; he had the firmest conviction that fun is healthy and sportiveness the truest sign of sanity" (Hingston, Panorama 27).

While putting many of their works in type and thus studying them word for word, Browne became familiar with a wide range of American humorists, but the two individuals whom he acknowledged as having the largest impression upon him were George H. Derby and Seba Smith (Pullen 22). Derby wrote under the pseudonyms of John P. Squibob and John Phoenix (22). His excellence was in a literary character that "was a completely solemn, horribly funny presentation of utter nonsense" (22). Smith was the creator of Major Jack Downing, a Maine backwoods boy "who went down to Portland with a load of ax handles, wandered into the statehouse, and ostensibly began sending letters home," the first appearing in print in 1830 (22). His later letters have him in Washington offering advice to President Andrew Jackson (23). The common sense, reckless boldness, and complete familiarity that this unsophisticated character took upon himself in addressing dignitaries were a delight to readers of this era (23).

This type of humor came from Maine and moved throughout New England. "'Down East' humor was typically a rustic, uneducated person's comments on life, especially town life" (McManus 9). This backwoods Yankee wrote letters to the local newspapers in expressing his "surprise and criticism of various social and political events" (10). His views were enjoyed because not only did he accurately ridicule the given situation, but also his own lack of schooling showed in his atrocious spelling, which was part of the humor (10).

Dialect humorists were successful in depending primarily upon the fact that their writings and sayings were "a subtle if unconscious flattery of the great unlettered American public, which

was tickled to death to find literary gentlemen speaking a language everybody could understand and cracking jokes comprehensible to the most unassuming intelligence" (A. C. Ward 458). The fame of Artemus Ward and others was not limited to the illiterate. Educated people found this type of humor to be "quaint, refreshing and restful" (458).

Like David Locke ("Petroleum V. Nasby") and Henry Shaw ("Josh Billings"), Browne began his career in the Northeastern humorous vein (McManus 9). After about a year as a printer, Browne began to contribute stories to the Carpet Bag under the pseudonym of "Lt. Chubb" (23). The brief stories were sketches of village gossips, town drunkards, and other Down East types or events (Abrams 61). Seven out of his ten stories were accepted for publication in 1852 and 1853, and he would celebrate each publication by attending the theater. It fascinated him; he studied the plays and worked to be in the society of the actors and actresses (Pullen 23). This complete absorption of the theater would later play an impetus on his decision to become a lecturer.

The Carpet Bag folded in March of 1853. Browne then traveled extensively across Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania, and finally settled first as a compositor and later as part of the editorial staff for the Toledo Commercial in Ohio (Pullen 23). Browne's writing quality became known in newspaper circles throughout northern Ohio. As a result, he was hired as a commercial editor for the Cleveland Daily Plain Dealer in November 1857. This newspaper was the "major Democratic newspaper in the West, comparable to Horace Greeley's Republican New York Tribune (Sloane, Twain 31). By January 1858, Browne had been promoted to city editor, and under his leadership, in competition with four other Cleveland dailies, the Plain Dealer had a circulation of 65,000 by 1860 (Pullen 24).

On January 30th, 1858, in an effort to liven up and fill space in his local reporting column of various civic happenings, Browne began to write letters to this paper in the persona of "Artemus Ward," an illiterate but shrewd Yankee showman traveling with a wax museum (Rasmussen 503). With a name taken from his imagination, Browne created this traveling showman who is "anxious to exhibit wax works, tame bears, and a kangaroo, and is apparently approaching nearer and nearer to the city" (Whitehill xi). Interestingly, this old showman, Artemus Ward, was born by bringing together literary hoaxes with newspaper platitudes, "the puff, the letter to the editor, and a new element" (Sloane, Twain 31). P. T. Barnum had popularized himself as the purveyor of "moral" tent shows throughout the East, Midwest, and South to fill in his American museum (31). His personality "provided the vulgarly hypocritical showman of the Artemus Ward pieces" (31). By the middle of the 1850s, nearly every American was aware of P. T. Barnum's career (31).

Browne's letters caught the attention and appreciation of his readers. His initial success led to a series of Artemus Ward letters. Through the policy of free exchange, newspapers throughout the country began to reprint his letters and they became the basis of his literary work (Abrams 61). As his reputation grew, Browne became known simply as Artemus Ward (Whitehill xi).

As a business proposition, the Ward letters were managed well. By 1860, Browne was producing two Ward letters a month and began sending them to the comic weekly Vanity Fair in New York in the fall of that year (Sloane, Twain 37). By the time he left Cleveland for New York City in late 1860, his letters had earned him a national reputation (Rasmussen 504). He became Vanity Fair's editor in 1861, and in 1862, when some of his letters were collected into a book entitled Artemus Ward, His Book, forty thousand copies were sold outright (Whitehill xi).

The most accessible public entertainment in the America of the 1850s was the lecture (Austin, Ward 94). Not only satisfying a popular desire for culture, it also gave a “good time” as well as an “outlet for gregariousness” (94). Lower and middle classes who were newly literate numbered in the thousands and had acquired an appetite for such subjects as “science, religion, economics, social theory, geography, spiritualism, and mesmerism” (94). In particular, the travelogue was especially welcomed because it “brought the romance of faraway places to relieve the boredom of provincial life” (94).

The 1830s and 1840s saw the growth of the lyceum movement (Austin, Ward 94). This gave way in the 1850s to what came to be called the “popular lecture” (94). Instead of bringing education to his fellow citizen, “the new lecturer gave the public what it wanted—for a price” (94). The reappearance of any platform speaker was based on his ability to talk “‘interestingly’ on foreign travel or on social and ethical topics” (94).

Sensing that the lyceum public was ready for a playful burlesque of the serious lecturer, Browne’s success with his letters led to his decision to become Artemus Ward upon the lecture platform. Stringing together random thoughts from his letters under the title “The Babes in the Wood,” he gave his first lecture in Connecticut on November 26, 1861 (Whitehill xi). He appeared successfully throughout New England and then offered his lecture in New York City on December 23, 1861. To his audiences’ surprise and delight, he did not appear as the physical personification of the Artemus Ward letters. Instead, they saw the formally and immaculately dressed young Charles Ferrar Browne speaking diversely on various topics with a deadpan manner commenting on life’s shortcomings with subdued humor (xii-xiii).

As his fame spread, Browne gave his lectures in California, Nevada, Salt Lake City, Denver, and throughout the eastern states and Canada. After five seasons of lecturing, he went

to England at the top of his performing career in June 1866 (Whitehill xiv). He was invited to and gladly contributed Artemus Ward letters to London's Punch magazine. Beginning in early November 1866, Browne "filled the Egyptian Hall in Piccadilly with his lecture on the Mormons and accompanying panorama" and pianist (xiv). It is to be noted that he was the first lecturer to use a comic panorama of visual subjects for a continuing string of digressions in his "Lecture on the Mormons" (Austin, Ward 102).

By late January 1867, Browne was too ill with tuberculosis to continue his lectures. Unable to recuperate, he died just short of his thirty-third birthday (Whitehill xv). Browne was not only successful in making comic lecturing respectable and lucrative, but also he made American "crackerbox" humor famous throughout the country and England.

Part II

Kenneth Lynn notes in his Forward to The Comic Tradition in America, that the nineteenth century is “the great age of American humor” (xi). At this time, the “comic expression of the popular mind was transmuted into print: an oral tradition became the raw material of a literary art” (xi). Furthermore, in his landmark work, Native American Humor, Walter Blair states that the literary comedians of the 1850s and the Civil War era had much wider audiences for their works than the “exploiters of Down East and frontier comedy had ever won” (102). Unlike their predecessors, the literary comedians were less concerned with local color than they were with the continuous amusement of their readers. Their goal was to get a laugh in every sentence or at least a laugh in every paragraph (118). Blair writes that Browne was the “first comic man to make a really good living from humor alone” (111). Indeed, at the beginning of Artemus Ward, His Book, Browne, in the guise of the old showman at the door of the tent, announces to the readers that while the performance is about to begin, “You could not well expect to go in without paying, but you may pay without going in. I can say no fairer than that” (Ward, His Book 15).

The extraordinarily successful publication of his first book in 1862 perhaps may also be due in part to its most public admirer, President Abraham Lincoln. On September 22nd, 1862, Lincoln called a meeting of his Cabinet at the White House. He would announce to them what would become the most important decision of his presidency: the Emancipation Proclamation that he had written only a day earlier (Leacock 91). His Cabinet was understandably upset from the inconclusive Battle of Antietam five days earlier, yet they found the President reading from a small book with his face visibly relaxed as he chuckled to himself (Pullen 1). He asked, “Gentlemen, have you ever read anything by Artemus Ward?” (1). By this time, “people all over

the country were laughing” at the letters of Ward that had now been collected into the book Lincoln was reading (1). While they certainly had heard of Ward, the Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton wrote that the Cabinet members looked blankly at the president because these were tragic times, and the meeting was supposed to be utterly serious (2).

Yet Lincoln proceeded to read Ward’s story “High-Handed Outrage at Utica” in which a wax figure of Judas Iscariot, as part of Ward’s show of wax figures depicting the Lord’s Last Supper, was suddenly seized by his feet. A son of “1 of the first famerlies in Utiky” pounded the figure into the ground screaming that Judas Iscariot “can’t show hissself in Utiky with impunerty by a darn site!” (Pullen 2). Ward sued the man and won a “verdick of Arson in the 3d degree” (2). Lincoln then laughed heartily as did apparently most of his Cabinet. Nevertheless, Stanton was quite shocked at what he thought was a needless display of laughter. He was about to walk out of the room when Lincoln put down the book, “sighed deeply, and said, as if in apology, ‘Gentlemen . . . with the fearful strain that is upon me night and day, if I did not laugh I should die, and you need this medicine as much as I do’” (2-3).

Lincoln then proceeded to read the Proclamation; and when he had finished, Stanton’s mood changed. He then approached the president with great enthusiasm and said, “Mr. President, if reading the chapters of Artemus Ward is a prelude to a deed such as this, the book should be filed among the archives of the nation and its author should be canonized” (Pullen 3).

Stephen Leacock has remarked that the Civil War “turned all funny men into camp followers—either with the army or behind it, or at a desk” (90). Despite the success of the Civil War-related letters of Locke’s Petroleum V. Nasby, the letters of Henry Shaw’s Josh Billings, and Robert H. Newell’s Orpheus C. Kerr papers, Browne’s reputation as the “unofficial jester of the Civil War period” provided “immeasurable service to Northern morale” (Austin, Ward 107).

Between 1857 and 1862, when the Plain Dealer and Vanity Fair employed Browne, he was the most productive in his Ward letters (Reed 45). They focused on notable people and events during the tumultuous time preceding and during the Civil War (45). In addition to Lincoln, Ward met with the Prince of Wales, Brigham Young, and with current women's reform groups as well as the abolitionists (45). His reputation became national in scope because he dealt with national problems such as the "draft, patronage, secession [and] the conduct of the war" (45). Browne wrote of his persona's encounters with "such contemporary sects as the Mormons, the Shakers, and the Spiritualists" (45). On issues that were highly controversial, Browne placed Ward almost always to be on the side of the majority of his readers (45). Seldom did he risk their loss by attacking a popular belief or not expounding a popular cause; and when he did, he employed his gentle humor (45).

The first Artemus Ward letters are mainly noted for their humor, rather than any satirical bent. The humor is mostly in the "personality, language, and activities of the old showman himself" (Reed 51). While they are addressed to the local editor of the Plain Dealer, the character enjoys a wider reputation in the nation because the letters come from different points in the Middle West and from a native of Baldinsville, Indiana, with "wide experience on the frontier" (51). Usually, they describe Ward's moral show of wild beasts and waxwork figures in his "mirth-provoking experiences in the various towns on his itinerary" (51). As he draws ever closer to Cleveland, he wants the editor to drum up excitement and advertising for Ward's unique show.

As the old showman, Ward mentions P. T. Barnum's American museum numerous times in his letters, thus connecting himself as "a lesser offspring of Barnum's entrepreneurial spirit" (Sloane, Twain 32). Browne was also fascinated by wordplay; and as a result, he "based much

of his written humor on puns and exaggerated misspellings” (Rasmussen 504). A combination of Ward’s first two letters in early 1858 to the Plain Dealer became “One of Mr. Ward’s Business Letters.” This letter was the first to appear in His Book and provides an illustration:

To the Editor of the ---- [Plain Dealer]

SIR--“I’m movin along—slowly along---down tords your place. I want you should rite me a letter, sayin how is the sho bizness in your place. My show at present consists of three moral Bares, a Kangaroo (a amoozin little Raskal---t’would make you larf yerself to deth to see the little cuss jump up and squeal) wax figgers of G. Washington Gen. Tayler John Bunyan Capt. Kidd and Dr. Webster in the act of killin Dr. Parkman, besides several miscellanyus moral wax statoots of celebrated piruts & murderers, &c., ekalled by few & exceld by none. Now Mr. Editor, scratch orf a few lines sayin how is the show bizniss down to your place. I shall hav my hanbills dun at your offiss. Depend upon it.

I want you should git my handbills up in flamin stile. Also git up a tremenjus excitemunt in yr. paper ‘bowt my onparaleld Show. We must fetch the public somhow. We must wurk on their feelins. Cum the moral on ‘em strong. If it’s a temprance community tell ‘em I sined the pledged fifteen minits arter Ise born, but on the contery ef your peple take their tods, say Mister Ward is as Jenial a feller as we ever met, full of conwiviality, & the life an Sole of the Soshul Bored. Take, don’t you? If you say anythin abowt my show say my snaiks is as harmliss as the new born Babe. What a interestin study it is to see a zewological animil like a snaik under perfect subjecshun! My Kangaroo is the most larfable little cuss I ever saw. All for 15 cents. I am anxys to skewer your infloounce. I repeet in regard to them hadbills that I shall fit’em struck orf up to your printin office.

My perlitercal sentiments agree with yourn exactly. I know thay do, becawz I never saw a man whoos didn't.

Respectively yures,

A. WARD.

P.S.---You scratch my back & Ile scratch your back. (Landon 27-28)

In Artemus Ward, Browne's social democracy was personified (Austin, Ward 62). "I'm a plane man," said the showman. "I don't know nothin about no ded languages and am a little shaky on live ones. What I shall say will be to the pint, right strate out'" (62). Cacography was seen in scattered letters in American newspapers as early as the first decade of the nineteenth century, reaching its height in the 1860s (Blair 118-119). Browne was one of the first humorists to "use misspelling for its own sake" (Austin, Nasby 67). This was "eye-dialect for comic effect. With the great American emphasis on correct spelling as the first step toward polite learning, Browne used comic spelling to mock social pretentiousness" (67). Furthermore, by having Ward write as a citizen of Indiana with a New England dialect, Ward represents "the common American more than the New Englander" (67).

His letter of February 18th, 1858, hails from Wheeling, Pennsylvania. Here he remarks that not all newspaper editors are professionally virtuous in their advertisements in that "the Editers in pittsburg air the sneakinst cusses I ever see. they Come to the Show in krowds and then ask me ten Sents a line for pufs. they said if I made a Row or Disturbence about it they would all jine in an giv my wax works perfeck Hel" (Seitz 26).

In addition to pointing out the foibles of editors, Browne also poked fun at the productivity of Toledo council meetings in his letter of March 7th, 1858. Apparently, his "cangeroo" escaped; and upon being informed of this dilemma while they were in session, the

council unanimously voted to “immediuntly ajourn and assist Mr. Ward for to capter his beast,” employing “(700) citizuns to jin in the pursoot” (Seitz 33-34). Browne has Ward gently mock himself by asking the Plain Dealer editor: “If yu put this letter in the papers i wish you wood be more particlar abowt the spellin and punctooation. i don’t ploom myself on my learnin” (34).

Browne’s good-natured humor of the old showman is pointed frequently at the “general reform movements such as women’s rights, temperance, and abolition, which were prominently featured in mid-nineteenth century America” (Reed 55). It must be noted that in giving his opposition to reform and reformers, Browne, through Ward, was not representing the minority (55). In The Growth of American Thought, Merle Curti states, “the majority of Americans were either indifferent or hostile to the reform movements” (Reed 56). For the most part, Ward’s humor is directed at the “lunatic fringe” in the reform groups (56). Browne’s one great exception to this is his extreme “antipathy to abolitionism,” explained by his “deep-seated prejudice against the Negro race, and by his strong political convictions” (56).

The struggle for women’s rights was quite strong during the 1850s and ‘60s, and its accomplishments were achieved against great opposition (Reed 57). In a letter titled “Women’s Rights,” Ward is giving his show in “Injianny” (Landon 76). He encounters a group of women from the “Bunkumville Female Moral Reformin & Women’s Rites Associashun” who want to see the show without paying (76). He refuses, and one of the group gives a speech on women’s rights (77). Losing his patience, the showman expresses his views on the subject in a heartfelt but gently formal manner:

‘My female friends,’ sed I, ‘be4 you lieve, I’ve a few remarks to mak; wa them well. The female woman is one of the greatest institooshuns of which this land can boste. It’s onpossible to get along without her. Had there bin no female wimin in the world, I

scarcely be here with my unpareld show on this very occashun. She is good in sickness-good in wellness-good all the time. O, woman, woman!’ I cried, my feelins worked up to a poetick pitch, ‘you air a angle when you behave yourself; but when you take off your proper appairel & (mettyforically spoken)—get into pantyloons-when you desert your firesides, & with your heds full of wimin’s rites noshuns go round like roarin lyons, seekin whom you may devour someboddy—in short, when you undertake to play the man, you play the devil and air an emfatic noosance. My female friends,’ I continnered, as they were indignantly departin, ‘wa well what A. Ward has sed!’ (77-78)

In the 1850s, the Temperance Movement was still very strong in the country (Reed 60).

The best known of its organizations was The Order of the Sons of Temperance that could “boast in the 1850s of thirty-six grand divisions, nearly six thousand subordinate units, and a quarter of a million paying members” (60). During Browne’s time with the Plain Dealer, an active unit of this organization was working in Cleveland; and he reported on many of its meetings in his column (60).

Artemus Ward’s “On The Wing” letter of January 12th, 1861 has him inexplicably feeling faint while on a westward-bound train from Detroit into Ann Arbor (C. Johnson 50). His solution is to order a drink (50). Unfortunately, a “pale-faced” temperance lecturer appears just as Ward is stirring his drink and says:

‘Look not upon the wine when it is red!’

Sez I, “his ain’t wine. This is Old Rye.’

‘It stingeth like a Adder and biteth like a Sarpent!’

sed the man.

‘I guess not,’ sed I, ‘when you put sugar into it. That’s the way I allers take mine.’ (50)

Ward's prudently humorous response deflates the lecturer's bitter warning.

Browne was firmly against abolition up to and during the Civil War. His "Oberlin" letter of March 30th, 1858 attacks the movement to abolish slavery (Reed 67). Located thirty miles from Cleveland, Oberlin College was the "center of western abolitionism, and the town of Oberlin was a prominent station of the Underground Railroad" (68). In 1833, the college agreed to admit Negro students (69). In the summer of 1858, Browne denounced the politics of Oberlin in admitting Negroes (69). He writes that while "blacks and whites have mixed," it is absurd to attempt "to educate the two races together" and that there is a strong suspicion that the Faculty are convinced of this "impracticability" (68-69). His letter to the editor has Professor Henry Peck, an energetic abolitionist, query the old showman:

'Mister Ward, I don't know about this [show] bizness. What are your sentimentums?'

Sez I, 'I hain't got any.'

'Good God!' cried the Perfesser, 'did I understan you to say you hav no sentiments?'

'Nary a sentimentum!' sez i.

'Mister Ward, don't your blud bile at the thawt that three million and a half of your culled brethren air a clankin their chains in the South?'

Sez I, 'not a bile! Let 'em clank!' (Landon 51)

Here one can find humor in the misspellings spoken by the learned professor and can smile at the rationality of Ward's opinion because he has no sentiments.

Yet Browne's attitude changed when the war was over. In dealing with conditions in the South during the period of Reconstruction, his letter entitled "The Negro Question" was written to Punch magazine while he was lecturing in London in 1866. While the old showman is sitting quietly in a London bar, two British women ask him for money to send missionaries to the

southern states so as to convert the newly freed Negroes (Reed 88-89). Ironically, Ward tells them that because a great “number of southern Negroes are starving, both from malnutrition and because of extreme poverty, their charity is misdirected” (89). Missionaries should not be sent. Instead, the ladies should first consider the immediate needs of the Negro:

But I happen to individually know that there are some thousands of liberated blacks in the South who are starvin. I don't blame anybody for this, but it is a very sad fact. Some are really too ill to work, some can't get work to do, and others are too foolish to see any necessity for workin. I was down there last winter, and I observed that this class had plenty of preachin for their sols, but skurce any vittles for their stummux. Now, if it is proposed to send flour and bacon along with the gospel, the idea is an excellent one. (A. Ward, Ward in London 96)

After Lincoln was elected, the Union's preservation became the top issue of the day. Browne's attention then shifted as he joined the editorial staff of Vanity Fair in the beginning of 1861 to the problems of secession, the new administration, and of course, to the war itself (Reed 76). Although Browne and the Plain Dealer had opposed Lincoln during his campaign, Browne did have the old showman treat the new president with humorous sympathy (76). One of his earliest contributions to Vanity Fair is on December 8th, 1860; and it is called “Artemus Ward on His Visit to Abe Lincoln.” The article recognizes that because Lincoln “was the first president whom the Republican Party had elected since its formation, he immediately faced almost overwhelming patronage problems” (76). Ward's humor is primarily aimed at the office seekers as he visits the new president-elect in Springfield shortly after the election.

Ward's letter is prefaced to his readers by stating his political beliefs: “I hav no pollertics. Nary a one. I'm not in the bisniss. If I was I spose I should holler versiffrusly in the streets at

nite and go home to Betsy Jane smelen of coal ile and gin, in the morning” (C. Johnson 137).

Therefore, putting himself in a gently objective position, he finds Lincoln to be besieged with “office seekers” (138). The old showman is not looking for a job and so is welcomed by Lincoln. But he does see that the “office seekers” have “perfectly overflowed” Lincoln’s house, dooryard, barn, woodshed, and his chimney within (139). It is to be noted that Browne’s creation uniquely enjoys a national exposure because he unashamedly names the office seekers as being from the states of Wisconsin, Michigan, Ohio, and the “Boundless West” (139-40).

Ward becomes so angry at the onslaught of the office seekers that he collars one who has descended from the chimney; and despite the fact that this man feels that he worked hard for the ticket by toiling night and day on the campaign, and so as a “patriot” he should be rewarded, Ward admonishes him by saying:

‘Virtue, sir, is its own reward. Look at me!’ He did look at me and quailed before my gaze.

‘The fact is,’ I continued, looking round on the hungry crowd, ‘there is scarcely a office for every lamp carried round during this campaign. I wish there was. I wish there was furrin missions to be filled on various lonely Islands where epidemics rage incessantly, and if I was in Old Abe’s place I’d send every mother’s son of you to them . . . can’t you give Abe a minute’s peace? Don’t you see he’s worried most to death! Go home you miserable men, go home & till the soil!’ In five minutes, the premises was clear. (C.

Johnson 141-42)

A grateful Lincoln asks Ward: “How can I ever repay you, sir?” (142). Ever the patriot for the Union and against secession, Ward replies that Lincoln should give the country “a good, sound administration. By pouring oil upon the troubled waters, North and South. By pursuing a patriotic, firm, and just course, and then if any State wants to secede, let ‘em secede!” (142).

But Lincoln is still hesitant and wants to know how to create his Cabinet. The confident Ward replies in a solution that could be enjoyed by many citizens who feel that the government may have politicians with inflated egos: "Fill it up with Showmen, sir! Showmen is devoid of pollertics. They hain't got any principles! They know how to cater for the public . . . Ef you doubt their literary ability, look at their posters" (C. Johnson 143). Yet Ward remains the humbly detached humorist by asking Lincoln not to call on him to serve on the Cabinet because the "moral wax figger perfeshun mustn't be permitted to go down while there's a drop of blood in these vains" (142). His appeasing humor is rhetorically effective because he extends unarguable advice for Lincoln while also putting himself, and thus almost every average person, onto Lincoln's level:

'ef you do the fair thing by your country you'll make as putty a angel as any one of us!
A. Linkin, use the talents which Nature has put into you judishusly and firmly, and all will be well! A. Linkin, adoo!'

He shook me cordyully by the hand—we exchanged picters, so we could gaze upon each others' liniments when far away from one another—he at the hellum of the ship of State, and I at the hellum of the show bizness—admittance only 15 cents. (143)

Just after the secession movement started, Browne termed it as "The Crisis" for an article in Vanity Fair on January 26th, 1861 (Reed 77). This is from a speech that Artemus Ward gave in his hometown of "Baldinsville, Injianny" in which he gave a spirited appeal for the preservation of the Union. Not only does he humorously scold the southern states for causing this war, or as he quaintly terms it, a "row," but he maintains that he will stand by the flag:

Feller Sitterzens, the Union's in danger. The black devil Disunion is trooly here, starein us all squarely in the face! We must drive him back!

Oh you fellers who air raisin this row, & who in the fust place startid it, I'm ashamed of you. The Showman blushes for you, from his boots to the topmost hair upon his venerable hed.

I shall stand by the Stars & Stripes. Under no circumstances whatsoever will I sesesh. Let every Stait in the Union sesesh & let Palmetter flags flote thicker nor shirts on Square Baxter's close line, still will I stick to the good old flag. (C. Johnson 80-81)

Not only can one agree with Ward's loyalty to the country, but also appreciate Ward's humor of reality in reminding his audience of the business need to maintain his show, "Wherever I pitch my little tent, you shall see floatin proudly from the center pole thereof the Amerikan Flag, with nary a star wiped out, nary a stripe less, but the same old flag that allers flotid thare! & the price of admishun will be the same it allers was—15 cents, children half price" (80).

Shortly after the Civil War began, Browne's piece called "The Show is Confiscated" appeared in Vanity Fair on May 11th, 1861. Artemus Ward reports that while he is touring his show in the southern states, a group of "seseshers" besieges him for displaying the Stars and Stripes and thus confiscates his show (C. Johnson 146). After spending a day in jail, the old showman manages to obtain an interview with Jefferson Davis, the President of the "Southern Conthieveracy" (146). Ward gently but clearly states the view of most Northern Democrats at the time that although they were generally against the Republican policy of restricting slavery expansion as well as imposing the Northern point of view on the South in other ways, most supported Lincoln and the Union once Fort Sumter had been attacked by the Davis government on April 12th (Reed 79). Ward tells Davis that this attack has brought the North behind the preservation of the Union. Also, Browne deliberately uses humorous misspellings to Davis' words to make him appear laughable as well:

‘Wall, wall, Mister Ward, you air at liberty to depart; you air frendly to the South, I know. Even now we hav many friends in the North, who sympathise with us, and wont mingle with this fight.’

‘J. Davis, there’s your grate mistaik. Many of us was your sincere frends, and thought sertin parties among us was fussin about you and meddlin with your consarns intirely too much. But J. Davis, the minit you fire a gun at the piece of dry-goods called the Star-spangled Banner, the North gits up and rises en massy, in defence of that banner. Not agin you as individooals,—not agin the South even—but to save the flag. . . . The gentleharted mother hates to take her naughty child across her knee, but she knows it is her dooty to do it. So we shall hate to whip the naughty South, but we must do it if you don’t make back tracks at onct, and we shall wallup you out of your boots!’ (C. Johnson 151)

Browne’s humorous defense of the Union was not restricted to the South. The Northern army was also a target for his successful humor in criticizing the conduct of the war in the North and in this example, the Union policy of recruiting ill-trained, badly organized, and insufficiently equipped militiamen (Reed 80). The July 6th, 1861 issue of Vanity Fair carried “The War Fever in Baldinsville” in which Ward returns from touring his show in the Confederacy so as to assume the duties of an officer in the “Baldinsville Company, a local unit of the state militia” (80). He is in great need of “recroots” and humorously notes his criticism of the extreme number of officers in these units by promoting all newly enlisted men to the rank of brigadier general (80). But to earn the promotions, they must first answer his following questions:

Do you know a masked battery from a hunk of gingerbread?

Do you know a epylit from a piece of chalk?

If I trust you with a real gun, how many men of your own company do you speck you can manage to kil durin the war? . . .

Have you ever had the measles, and if so, how many?

How air you now?

Show me your tongue, &c., &c. Sum of the questions was sarcusistical. (C. Johnson 161)

Not only does Browne satirize the usually self-important militia captain, but he also has Ward openly admit that some of his questions are sarcastic.

Browne's second book, Artemus Ward; His Travels was published in 1865. It includes an article that appeared during the war that expresses the prevailing view of and gently targets the ineptness of Congress to exhibit wise and responsible leadership during this crisis:

Gentlemen of the Senit & of the House, you've sot there and draw'd your pay and made summer-complaint speches long enuff. The country at large, incloodin' the undersined, is disgusted with you. Why don't you show us a statesman—sumbody who can make a speech that will hit the pop'lar hart right under the Great Public weskit? Why don't you show us a statesman who can rise up to the Emergency, and cave in the Emergency's head?

Congress, you won't do. Go home, you mizzerable devils—go home!

At a special Congressional 'lection in my district the other day I delib'ritly voted for Henry Clay. I admit that Henry is dead, but inasmuch as we don't seem to have a live statesman in our National Congress, let us by all means have a first-class corpse. (A. Ward, Travels 36)

Browne's humor during the Civil War was not only directed toward abolition, Lincoln and his administration, secession, the South, the Northern army, and Congress, but also toward

draft-evaders in the civilian population of the North. In “A War Meeting” that appeared in Artemus Ward; His Travels, Ward successfully uses humor to ridicule the false patriots who have meetings and make loud speeches about the need to fight for the North and country while they themselves stay at home safely (Reed 84). Ward tells of a meeting in Baldinsville at which several such individuals are making pompous patriotic speeches. Ward’s wife, Betsy Jane, breaks up one speech and subsequently the meeting itself by berating:

‘You air willin’ to talk and urge others to go to the wars, but you don’t go to the wars yourselves. War meetin’s very nice in their way, but they don’t keep Stonewall JACKSON from comin’ over to Maryland and helpin’ himself to the fattest beef critters. What we want is more cider and less talk. We want you able-bodied men to stop speechifying, which don’t ‘mount to the wiggle of a sick cat’s tail, and go to fi’tin’; otherwise you can stay to home and take keer of the children, while we wimmin will go to the wars!’

Gentl’men,’ said I, ‘that’s my wife! Go in old gal!’ and I throw’d up my ancient white hat in perfeck rapters. (A. Ward, Travels 20)

Though primarily humorous, one can admire this one example that could have signaled women as certainly worthy of fighting for their country in the future.

As for the old showman himself in considering whether to volunteer to fight, his “Artemus Ward to the Prince of Wales” letter in His Travels would appear to have one appreciate his sense of self-preservation. He wrote “I have already given two cousins to the war, & I stand reddy to sacrificiss my wife’s brother ruther ‘n not see the rebelyin krusht. And if wuss cumms to wuss I’ll shed ev’ry drop of blud my able-bodid relations has got to prosekoot the war” (A. Ward, Travels 95).

“Artemus Ward in Richmond” was written in May of 1865 and was published in His Travels. Like “The Negro Question” the humor is more somber given the effects of the war and conditions in the South during the Reconstruction Period. Here the old showman visits the Rebel capital just a few days after General Lee’s surrender. At an eating house, he meets a young, “proud and hawty suthener” who is starving (A. Ward, Travels 93). The man thinks that Ward is in the South just to gloat over a fallen people, but Ward pleasantly and sympathetically ensures that the young man eats his fill. Ward then judiciously admonishes the young man’s attitude while showing his heartbreak over the tremendous loss of life:

‘Young man,’ I mildly but gravely sed, ‘this crooil war is over, and you’re lickt! It’s rather necessary for sumbody to lick in a good square, lively fite, and in this ‘ere case it happens to be the United States of America. You fit splendid, but we was too many for you. Then make the best of it, & let us all give in and put the Republic on a firmer basis nor ever. . . . I’m thinkin’ of the sea of good rich Blud that has been spilt on both sides in this dredful war! I’m thinkin’ of our widders and orfuns North, and of your’n in the South. I kin cry for both. . . . God be good to you, my poor dear, my poor dear.’ (92-93)

Yet, the soothing humor is still understated in the midst of this national tragedy as Ward kindly takes the hand of his friend and says:

Yung man, adoo! You Southern fellers is probly my brothers, tho’ you’ve occasionally had a cussed queer way of showin’ it! It’s over now. Let us all jine in and make the country on this continent that shall giv’ all Europe the cramp in the stummuck ev’ry time they look at us! . . . the Star-Spangled Banner is wavin’ round loose agin, and that there don’t seem to be anything the matter with the Goddess of Liberty beyond a slite cold.

(93)

A strong spirit of patriotism and nationalism existed in the United States prior to the Compromise of 1850, reaching an extremely high point during the Civil War (Reed 89). Reinforced by science, religion, literature, and historical writing, this model of nationalistic and patriotic fervor was characterized by noisily sentimental enthusiasm for national symbols. The flag, the eagle, and Uncle Sam were integral in the growth of patriotic feelings. People formed historical societies, and monuments were erected to honor the battles and heroes of the Revolution. There was a tremendous sense of pride for the nation's past as well as for its boundless future (89-90).

In his articles and letters, Ward was constantly amused by the vocal and emotional expressions of patriotism (Reed 91). In an article that reports his trip to Canada, he states ironically of the Canadians: "Troo, they air deprived of many blessins. They don't enjoy, for instans, the priceless boon of a war. They haven't any American Egil to onchain, and they hain't got a Fourth of July to their backs" (Hotten 260). Another article is called "Boston" and here his humor is effectively good-humored in poking fun at the respect paid to national monuments:

I went over to Lexington yes'd'dy. My Boosum hove with sollum emotions. '& this,' I said to a man who was drivin a yoke of oxen, 'this is where our revolutionary forefathers asserted their independence and spilt their Blut. Classic ground!'

'Wall,' the man said, 'it's good for white beans and potatoes, but as regards raisin wheat, t'ain't worth a dam. But hav you seen the Grate Orgin?' (Hotten 277)

A portion of Browne's best Ward letters is aimed at spread-eagle oratory, which was a very open show of patriotism and nationalism during the period. People loved hearing great orators such as Henry Clay and Daniel Webster (Reed 92-93). At holiday celebrations and political rallies, the spread-eagle oratory was one of the main attractions; and it included "high-

sounding phrases, numerous classical allusions, artificial gestures, and extreme vocal modulations” using a strong enough voice to “make the eagle scream” (93). However, the actual speech could oftentimes be disappointing in commonplace statements. Ward’s Vanity Fair article, “Fourth of July Oration,” delivered at Weathersfield, Connecticut, in 1859 makes fun of Ward himself in an opening note to the readers, in which he says, “I have revised the orashun, . . . I have also corrected the grammars and punktooated it. I do my own punktooatin now days. The Printers in Vanity Fair offiss can’t punktooate worth a cent” (Landon 175).

Ward continues to tell his audience that he will not be the usual orator by recounting “the growth of Ameriky frum the time when the Mayflowers cum over in the Pilgrim and brawt Plymouth Rock with them” (175). Furthermore, he gently takes exception to honoring the Puritans by declaring with irony, “You will excuse me if I don’t prase the erly settlers of the Kolonies. Peple which hung idiotic old wimin for witches, burnt holes in Quakers’ tongues and consined their feller critters to the treadmill and pillery on the slitest provocashun may hav bin very nice folks in their way, but I must confess I don’t admire their stile, and will pass them by” (176).

This letter was illustrated for Vanity Fair with a woodcut of Ward’s holding onto the American flag with one hand and gesturing toward heaven with the other.



MR. WARD DELIVERING HIS GREAT UNION SPEECH. [See Page 209.]

Fig. 1. Drawing from Artemus Ward, His Book (New York: G. W. Carleton & Co., 1862).

It is not so much a burlesque but rather a comically light humorous criticism of the usual type of oratorical speakers of his day (Reed 94). The showman ends his speech by giving an inoffensive and favorite message to the audience: "Be vertuous and you'll be happy!" (Landon 179).

During the early part of the nineteenth century, religion played an important role in the West (Reed 94). A revival movement surged over the frontier; and in the "wave of fervor that followed, a multiplicity of cults sprang up" (95). In the rapidly developing West, religious practices had become an individual matter; and as the frontiersman had a firm belief in equality, freedom, and progress, every new proclaimer of a divine revelation could anticipate an enthusiastic following (95). Practicing in areas that were relatively free from conventional social restraints, some religious leaders were "often emotionally unstable individuals" and founded "some extremely bizarre cults, which were often looked upon with horror by the members of older and more orthodox sects" (95).

During Browne's residence in Ohio, there were a number of unconventional cults that were flourishing; and they were objects of great curiosity by the public. Thus, it was not unusual for Browne to use them as subjects of his gently humorous satirical sketches (Reed 95). It is to be noted that while the old showman is "conservatively Protestant in his religious outlook, Ward's own religious beliefs are never clearly" given in his writings (95). His reproofs of a sect are actually "his amusement at the staid members of the community who are horrified and outraged at the unconventional religious practices of the group" (96).

Browne's first article on the Mormon leader Brigham Young and his practice of polygamy appeared in the Plain Dealer on February 2nd, 1859 (Reed 98). Its basis was a speech given by Young in Cleveland's Chapin Hall in that month (98). In his column, Browne commented that the Mormon leader, who was based in Great Salt Lake City, Utah, had

journeyed though the Middle West “for the purpose of feeling the public pulse and replenishing his stock of wives” (98). On May 18th, 1859, Browne writes in his column that the followers of Young are being fooled and burdened by “cunning and crafty men,” and he believes that it takes a great amount of “credulity or idiocy or rascality” to make “a regular full-blown Mormon” (99).

On November 10th, 1860, Browne has Artemus Ward contribute a letter to Vanity Fair. It is entitled “Artemus Ward Visits Brigham Young,” and it tells of the old showman’s visit to Salt Lake City (Reed 100). Ironically enough, Browne himself had yet to visit the Mormons in Utah and would not do so until 1864 when he toured the city as the lecturer, Artemus Ward. In this letter, Ward has great fun at Young’s expense. Ward efficiently uses his humor in getting permission from Young to set up his “grate show” (Landon 64). Browne also has Young speak in dialect and misspellings as he had done with Lincoln and Jefferson Davis. Before granting permission, Young asks Ward:

‘Do you bleeve in Solomon, Saint Paul, the immaculateness of the Mormin Church and the Latter-Day Revelashuns?’

‘Sez I, ‘I’m on it!’ I make it a pint to get along plesunt, tho I didn’t know what under the Son the old feller was drivin at. He sed I mite show. (Landon 64)

Ward learns that Young has a “Scarum” of eighty wives (65). He also learns that it takes Young six weeks to kiss his wives, he doesn’t know all his children, but “every child he meats call him Par, & he takes it for grantid it is so” (66). Sadly, his wives fight so much among themselves that “he has bilt a fitin room for thare speshul benefit, & when too of ‘em get into a row he has em turnd loose into that place, whare the dispoot is settled accordin to the rules of the London prize ring” (66). Furthermore, this unique married life is not always pleasant. Young relates to Ward that “Sumtimes they abooz” him by pulling most of his hair out of its roots and

he “wares meny a horrible scar upon his body, inflicted with mop-handles, broom sticks, and sich” (66). Ward calls Young a “Profit” who admits that sometimes he wishes he had remained single (66).

Ever the defender of the United States Constitution, when Ward is about to leave the city, he is accosted by a group of “femaile Mormonesses, ceasin” him by his coat tails and swinging him around rapidly by declaring that they had a “Revelashun bidden” them to see his show for free (Landon 66). Ward gets “putty rily” and tells them to tell “Mister Revelashun to mind his own bizness, subject only to the Konstitushun of the United States!” (66-67). Ward’s continued patriotism allows him to be a favorite character to his readers.

Different in viewing marriage from the Mormon standpoint, the United States Society of Believers, commonly known as the “Shakers,” established four communities in Ohio shortly after 1800 (Reed 106-07). The name “Shaker” comes from the unique displays of body movement that are a part of their religious worship (106-07). Two of the unusual traits of the cult are celibacy among all members and communalism. From April of 1859 to April 1860, Browne made two trips to the Shaker village of North Union, located near Cleveland, and reported objectively on his witnessing of their ceremonies and way of life to the Plain Dealer (107-08). His articles show tolerance and admiration for their lifestyle, concluding that while their lives are “unnatural . . . [and] their rules respecting marriage are not exactly our ‘style,’ their sincerity cannot be doubted” (109).

However, on February 23rd, 1861, Browne submits his letter to Vanity Fair in the persona of Artemus Ward and presents a very different view of the Shakers (Reed 109). Once again, a citizen of the nation, Ward was in the “exterior of New York State” when a storm forces him to stay overnight with the Shakers (Landon 30). The old showman is quite amused by the strange

customs, costumes, and speech of the cult. During his stay, a grave-faced Elder Shaker named “Brother Uriah” continues to answer Ward’s humorous observations by solemnly declaring that he is a “man of sin!” (Reed 110). After he sees one of their rituals, his opinion is asked by one of the Shakers. His friendly humor ably gives this view:

Why this jumpin up and singin? This long weskit bizness, and this anty-matrimony idee? My friends, you air neat and tidy. Your lands is flowin with milk and honey. Your brooms is fine, and your apple sass is honest. . . . You are honest in your dealins. You air quiet and don’t disturb nobody. For all this I givs you credit. But your religion is small pertaters, I must say. Here you air al pend up by yerselves, talkin about the sins of a world you don’t know nothin of. Meanwhile said world continners to resolve round on her own axeltree onct in every 24 hours, subjeck to the Constitution of the United States, and is a very plesant place of residence. It’s a unnatural, onreasonable and dismal life you’re leading here. So it strikes me. (Landon 36-37)

Ward’s view of life is positive, always patriotic; and although his view of the Shakers respects their qualities, realistically, their lifestyle is simply too narrow-minded for the reader with whom Ward identifies.

In the 1840s and 1850s, a religious faith set in the belief in communicating with the dead, called spiritualism, gained many converts (Reed 110). The movement did not become an organized church, but spiritualist meetings featuring “spirit communications” had substantial publicity and were the object of wide comment and debate (110). During Browne’s time with the Plain Dealer, he noted in his column that the movement was making considerable progress in Cleveland through a regular lecture series and a growing number of sympathizers. On May 18th, 1858, he reported on attending what turned out to be a failed demonstration of spiritualism in

Chapin's Hall by which spirits were supposed to "extinguish candles and play tunes on musical instruments" (111).

Browne's one letter on the spiritualist movement was to the Plain Dealer on December 13th, 1858 (Reed 111). Under the title "Among the Spirits," Ward is induced to attend a séance, despite the fact that he does not believe in the practice (C. Johnson 43). Preceding the séance, "[one] of the long hared fellers" gave a short lecture on spiritualism. Unfortunately, though the old showman is completely bewildered by the speaker's use of such unfamiliar phrases as "ethereal essunce" and "koordinat branches of superhuman nature," he does "make it a pint to get along as pleasant as possible" and so applauds the speaker (44).

Once the séance begins, Ward is asked if there is anyone with whom he would like to converse. He replies that if his former show "bizness" partner Bill Tompkins is sober, he would like a few words with him (C. Johnson 43). Three "knox" or raps on the table were needed to call for Bill's spirit; and after learning how his friend is still in show business with "Bill Shakespeer," Ward asks Tompkins if he can repay the "13 dollars" that he owes the old showman (45-46). Regrettably, Ward says, "He sed no with one of the most tremenjjs knox I ever experiunsed," and then his spirit apparently departs (46).

Ward then chats with the spirit of his father, now in the peanut "bizness & liked it putty well, tho' the climit was rather warm" (C. Johnson 46). Browne makes a gently ironic tribute to his own chosen profession by having Ward's father disapprove of his letters to the newspapers. His father feels that this job will cause Ward to lose his character for the sake of "trootth and verrasserty" (46). Apparently, his father helped him into show business with the understanding that his son would "dignerfy that there perfeshun. Literatoor is low" (46).

When the séance is over Ward is asked what he thought of it; and his reply is very direct, particularly in his satire of spiritual mediums:

Sez I, 'my frends, I've been into the show biznes now goin on 23 years. Theres a artikil in the Constitutooshun of the United States which sez in effeck that everybody may think just as he darn pleases, & them is my sentiments to a hare. You dowtlis believe this Sperret doctrin while I think it is a little mixt. Just so soon as a man becums a reglar out & out Sperret rapper he leeves orf workin, lets his hare grow all over his face and commensis spungin his livinout of other peple. He eats all the dickshunaries he can find & goze round chock full of big words, scarein the wimmin folks & little children and destroyin the piece of mind of evry famerlee he enters. He don't do nobody no good & is a cuss to society & a pirit on honest peple's corn beef barrils. Admittin all you say about the doctrin to be troo, I must say the reglar professional Sperret rappers—they as make a biznis on it—air about the most ornery set of cusses I ever encountered in my life.' (46-47).

Ward is his own businessman and obviously disapproves of the spiritual medium profession that preys upon the feelings of the general population of families. His reference to the Constitution also helps to endear him to his readers.

Although the majority of Browne's Artemus Ward letters focuses on Americans and the American scene, he did comment upon Britain and the British (Reed 119). In 1860, nineteen-year-old Albert Edward, Prince of Wales, visited Canada and the United States on a good will tour (119). At this time, the relationship between Great Britain and America was not entirely friendly. The British feared that the United States was going to annex Canada just as it had done

with California and Texas. On the other hand, many Americans were suspicious of the British campaign against slavery (119).

Despite these uneasy feelings, the prince was warmly received wherever he went, the streets were crowded, and the public quickly responded to his “cheerful friendliness” (Reed 120). Browne covered this tour in the Plain Dealer and sailed across the lake to Brantford, Ontario, in order to see the prince on September 14th, 1860. The next day, his column appeared; and he wrote that “There are no airs about him, although he is bored as no poor over-petted boy was ever bored before, his countenance wears a smile of cheerful resignation; and were you to meet him, not knowing that he was a Prince, you would set him down as a good-looking, kind-hearted, and affable young man” (120).

On September 17th, 1860, the Plain Dealer printed “Artemus Ward Sees the Prince of Wales,” a humorous account of the old showman’s claiming that he had an interview with “Mrs. Victory’s hopeful sun Albert Edward” (C. Johnson 122). Elbowing his way through a crowd in a hotel tavern, he gets closer to the prince (123). Proud of his humble origins, Artemus considers himself as everyone’s equal, including the Prince of Wales (Austin, Ward 62). But when he tries to get within earshot of him, Ward is halted by one of the royal guard who asks him just where does he think he is going so boldly (C. Johnson 124). Ward replies that he wants to speak with the prince and asks the guard who does he think he is (124). The guard is in shock that Ward actually thinks he can simply strike up a conversation with the prince and, deliberate misspellings included, replies:

‘But blarst my hize, sir, its onprecedented. It’s orful, sir. Nothin’ like it hain’t happened sins the Gun Power Plot of Guy Forks. Owdashus man, who air yu?’

‘Sir,’ sez I, drawin myself up & puttin on a defiant air, ‘I’m a Amerycan sitterzen. My name is Ward. I’m a husband & the father of twins, which I’m happy to state thay look like me. By perfeshun I’m an exhibiter of wax works & sich.

‘Good God!’ yelled the Kurnal, ‘the idee of a exhibiter of wax figgers goin into the presents of Royalty! The British Lyon may well roar with raje at the thawt!’

Sez I, ‘Speakin of the British Lyon, Kurnal, I’d like to make a bargin with you fur that beest fur a few weeks to add to my Show.’ (C. Johnson 124)

Fortunately for Ward, the prince himself approaches and, accepting Ward’s business card, receives him warmly, offering him a “segar” (C. Johnson 125). As they both enjoy their cigars, Ward freely asks him “how he liked bein Prince as fur as he’d got” (126). Browne places the prince down to an identifiable level with the readers by using New England dialect and misspellings, and so the reply is quite honest:

‘To speak plain, Mister Ward,’ he sed, ‘I don’t much like it. I’m sick of all this bowin & scrapin & crawlin & hurrain over a boy like me. I would rather go threw the country quietly & enjoy myself in my own way, with the other boys, & not be made a Show of to be garped at by everybody. . . . But you know, Mr. Ward, I can’t help bein a Prince, & I must do all I kin to fit myself fur the persishun I must sum time ockepy.’ (126)

The meeting has come to an end; and Ward keeps himself on the level of the prince by announcing his required departure, instead of the expected other way around. He then delivers his opinion of the prince directly:

Albert Edard, I must go, but previs to doin so I will obsarve that you soot me. Yu’re a good feller, Albert Edard, & tho I’m agin Princes as a ginral thing, I must say I like the cut of your Gib. When you git to be King try and be as good a man as yure muthr has

bin! Be just & be Jenerus, espeshully to showmen, who hav allers bin aboozed sins the dase of Noah, who was the fust man to go into the Menagery bizniss . . . Albert Edard, adoo! (126-27)

In a final act of the business of good will, Ward then generously gives the prince a “perpetooal free pars” to his show, “& also parses to take hum for the Queen and Old Albert” (127).

In reaction, one can only laugh at Ward. One laughs “at his appearance, his grammar, his ‘owdashusness” (Austin, Ward 63). But one is also expected to laugh with him because it is the common American “sitterzen” who has the last laugh (63). Browne’s, as well as his readers’ sympathies are always with Ward. The readers are not asked to tolerate him; rather his literary success is that in the placid humor, they can simply identify with him. His author makes no apologies for him but presents Ward as an equal (63).

Josh Billings’ creator, Henry Wheeler Shaw, once remarked that “Artemus is great in telling a story, having an imaginative power to conceive an accident, plan the action of a piece of drollery, invent an odd character, and describe his creation with infinite humor and force” (Shaw xxviii). In his work Initial Studies in American Literature, Henry A. Beers defines wit as “the laughter of the head as humor is of the heart” (195). Browne’s humor in the Artemus Ward letters is effective in supporting these observations. During his lifetime, his success as a humorist was quite remarkable. The letters were reprinted in periodicals and newspapers throughout the country, his two books sold profitably, and “people in America quoted his witty and nonsensical sayings” (Reed 212).

In support of Browne’s literary humor as rhetorically non-acerbic, his friend William Dean Howells stated that his humor “dealt with any contemporary aspect or incident in a spirit of

frank and ready adaptability” (Howells, Introduction ix). Also, his humor was “by no means unkindly; on the contrary, he much preferred making the joke that did not hurt, that did not displease, or wholly displease even the object of it” (xi). He adds that Browne’s humor is unique because

it lies rather in the wild impossibility of its relation to the persons and things of its contact, in the delightful, the inviting make-believe of the whole situation. At this the reader may sometimes find himself working as hard as the author; but his sufficient reward will be in the final truth to human nature, either actual or potential, which the joint supposition evokes. It is such fun to think of Artemus Ward talking to Lincoln or the Prince of Wales on the terms assumed, that you are willing and even glad to think it.

(xiv)

In her work Crackerbox Philosophers in American Humor and Satire, Jennette Tandy supports the idea of Ward’s effectively tender humor, by writing that he does not “vilify or slander” his subjects or topics (145). Instead, “Very properly, he stands firm for the conservatism of his day, though he is too worldly-wise, too kindly, for personal animosity. He preaches the gospel of a broad and upright toleration . . .” (145).

As an important figure to a student of American humorous literature, Browne is a “transitional figure in the field of nineteenth century humor”; and “he was the first of a group who shifted the focus of humor from a local region to the nation as a whole” (Reed 213). Although certainly not the greatest American humorist, Browne as Artemus Ward has been called the first “national” humorist of America (Leacock 96). His literary importance is due to a humor that cannot be characterized as strictly Yankee in nature (Reed 214). His years in Cleveland allowed him to adopt many of the literary thoughts of the West, and they colored his

humor. While not as “rude and hilarious as that of the Old Southwest, the oral flavor of the Artemus Ward letters probably represents the influence of the Southwestern school of humor” (215). In the character of the old showman, one can detect not only the traits of the Yankee peddler, but also “the frontiersman, and the Southwest yarn spinner” (215).

Tandy notes that in studying American humorous caricatures, she sees a “folk-hero, the homely American” and that there is “continuity about the persistence of this homely type in our American literature which suggests a national ideal” (ix-x). She notes that Artemus Ward is “peculiarly fitted to represent the American at large” (145). With indigenous gusto and fertility . . . He is throughout the American commoner in all his individual narrow prosiness and his aggregate deep and unforced and infinite variety” (145).

Additionally, Howells remarked that his “drollery wafted his pseudonym as far at the English speech could carry laughter,” and that Browne was a “Westernized Yankee. He added an Ohio way of talking to the Maine way of thinking, and he so became a literary product of a rarer and stranger sort than our literature had otherwise known” (Howells, Literary Friends 110). Indeed, he has a right to be called the country’s first national humorist. Unlike his fellow literary comedians, Browne’s contributions to humor in American literature are extraordinarily unique for his time. Through Ward, Browne gave his humorous thoughts on contemporary issues such as women’s rights, the temperance movement, abolition, the Union’s preservation, secession, the North’s foibles in its part in the war, Lincoln and his administration, Congress, sentimental patriotism, the Mormons, the Shakers, spiritualism, Britain and the British. Given the diverse and national topics and places on which this journalist focused his humor, one can conclude that his humor was national rather than simply regional in scope.

However, Browne's growing fame was not to be just on his written work; singularly, he was the first literary comedian to enjoy tremendous success as a platform humorist (Leacock 96). According to his lecture agent and manager Edward P. Hingston, Browne grew "tired of the pen, he resolved on trying the platform. Instead of merely writing as a showman, he determined to be one, and boldly to face that public which hitherto he had addressed from the dark recesses of a printing-office" (Hingston, Genial Showman 77). In his article "The Popularity of Nineteenth-Century American Humorists," Walter Blair notes that on the lecture stage in his literary creation's persona, Browne was the "first important humorist of America to acquire money and fame by giving comic lectures" (Blair 188). As a platform entertainer, Browne's singularly unique commercial success was to be enjoyed by American and English audiences.

Part III

There are many different reasons for the commercial success of Browne's lectures in his persona of Artemus Ward. To begin with, his idea of using the lecture platform for a display of pure comedy was a unique one in his time. He was also the first literary comedian to sense that it was the right time for a burlesque of the serious lecture. Moreover, he knew that because he looked nothing like his fictional creation, he would have to create a new persona: one that would display a gift for rhetorically gentle humor in an understated deadpan manner. To this end, he put together a random string of his jokes and puns and connected them with topical stories; and even if the connections seemed absurd, he would deliberately act unaware of their absurdities. These purposeless connections, told solemnly, became the substance of his lecture.

His success can also be seen in the extraordinarily large number of cities, towns, and mining camps that he toured and in the abundant frequency of his appearances. With regard to his touring seasons from 1861 through 1866, he was very successful in advertising himself in inimitably different ways. Furthermore, the humor employed in his lecture pamphlets added to the quality of his performances. Also, in his "Lecture on the Mormons," he was the first lecturer to use a comic panorama of visual subjects for a continuous string of intentional digressions. He also employed a pianist who knew to play music that was calculatingly inappropriate to the tone and subjects in his lecture, resulting in the audience's continued laughter.

When he wrote for the Plain Dealer, he would attend and report on the various circus and minstrel shows that came into the city. Ironically, he would repeatedly hear a story of his own, given by the "'middle-man' of the minstrels and received with hilarity by the audiences" (Hingston, Panorama 22). Then at another place, he would find himself being entertained by listening to his own jokes being delivered by the "clown of the ring and shouted at by the public"

as excellent merriment on the part of the performer (22). Thus, coupled with his lifelong love of the theater, he thought that if anyone were going to make a living with his humor, it would be himself.

Browne's timing in his decision was crucial in aiding his lecture success. The popular lecture was indeed popular as before the Civil War it had spread throughout the United States "from Boston to Detroit and Maine to Florida" (Blair, "Popularity" 188). By 1870, Ward's agent, E. P. Hingston noted, "America is a lecture-hall on a very extensive scale. . . . There are raised seats on the first tier in the Alleghenies, and gallery accommodations on the top of the Rocky Mountains. . . . The voice of the lecturer is never silent in the United States" (188). The people who attended lectures anticipated moral and serious instruction along with entertainment. This was the audience that "Browne succeeded in captivating—precisely by ridiculing their expectations" (Austin, Ward 96).

The thought of informing or instructing his audience was never in his plans. His goal was just to amuse:

If possible keep the house in continuous laughter for an hour and-a-half, for that was the precise time, in his belief, which people could sit to listen and to laugh without becoming bored; and, if possible, send his audience home well pleased with the lecturer and with themselves, without their having any clear idea of that which they had been listening to, and not one jot the wiser than when they came. No one better understood than [Browne] the wants of a miscellaneous audience who paid their dollar or half-dollar each to be amused. (Hingston, Panorama 26-27)

As a result, his captivated audience "did not realize what had happened to them. They were entertained and allowed that they must have been instructed" (Austin, Ward 96).

Browne had to decide in what form he would appear before the public; and because it was “unoccupied ground, [t]hat of a humorous lecturer seemed to him to be the best” (Hingston, Panorama 23). While America did have entertainers who used facial changes or unusual costumes to entertain their audiences, “there was no one who ventured to joke for an hour before a house full of people with no aid from scenery or dress” (23). Due to his tall, thin, and lanky frame, coupled with an eagle-like nose and a moustache covering his mouth, Browne knew that it was impractical to use facial expressions for humor and that it was unrealistic to actually appear as a showman with “harmless snakes,” and “trained” kangaroos (Austin, Ward 97).

He originated a plan of creating a lecture that “should contain the smallest possible amount of information with the greatest quality of fun” (Haweis 134). He gathered all his best jokes, “quips and cranks,” and invented new drolleries on social and political topics of the day (Hingston, Panorama 24). He collected “quaint thoughts, whimsical fantasies, bizarre notions, and ludicrous anecdotes” and tied them all together “without relevancy or connection” (26). This string of jests was “combined with a stream of satire, the whole being as unconnected, and one jest having as little relation to another, as the articles in any number of a comic periodical” (Hingston, Genial Showman 96).

In Browne’s first three lecture seasons from 1861 to 1864, “[h]e had no panorama, nor any thing to exhibit but himself; therefore, to become a humorous lecturer, with simply humor, fun and satire blended together to form the basis of his entertainment, appeared to him to be that for which he was most fitting, and that which would best suit the public” (Hingston, Genial Showman 96). With great care, his lecture was made “with studied incoherency in some of its details. A burlesque upon a lecture, rather than a lecture in the accepted meaning of the term was precisely that which it amounted to” (96). Borrowing the title of a well-known children’s story,

he called his lecture “The Babes in the Wood” (96). Of course, the title was completely irrelevant to the lecture; and this was his point. “Incongruity as an element of fun was always an idea uppermost in the mind of the western humorist” (Hingston, Panorama, 28).

While Browne could have opened his show at Clinton Hall in New York City, he astutely realized that its uniqueness had to be first tested in a typical small town with its own lecture hall and “its share of lecture-loving people” (Hingston, Genial Showman 97). Therefore, he chose Norwich, a small town near New London, Connecticut, and opened his show on November 26th, 1861 (Whitehill xi). Despite his nervousness, his *début* was an instant success. The audience not only laughed greatly, but they also gathered around him after the lecture in sympathy because they believed that “the purposely odd and disjointed character of the lecturer was the result of intense nervousness on the part of the lecturer, and that in his confusion of thought he had forgotten to tell them any thing about the Babes. He had never intended to. Therein lay the gist of the great joke which constituted the so-called lecture” (Hingston, Genial Showman 97).

In fact, the “Babes” themselves were never mentioned more than twice in the entire lecture. He first said that the “Babes” were to comprise the subject of his lecture. Then he deliberately digressed to jokes and stories and humorous observations on life that had nothing to do with the title. Once again at the conclusion of an hour and-a-half, he finished in this way:

‘I now come to my subject—“The Babes in the Wood.” Here he would take out his watch, look at it with affected surprise, put on an appearance of being greatly perplexed, and amidst roars of laughter from the people, very gravely continue, ‘But I find that I have exceeded my time, and will therefore merely remark that so far as I know they were very good babes—they were as good as ordinary babes. I really have not the time to go into their history. You will find it all in the story-books. They died in the woods,

listening to the woodpecker tapping the hollow beech-tree. It was a sad fate for them, and I pity them. So, I hope, do you. Good night!’ (Hingston, Panorama 30).

These words were not accidental. In preparation and delivery, Browne consistently planned and rehearsed every word. “‘A line,’ he once said, ‘if you can hit the right thing, will give as good an idea of a place as whole pages’” (Austin, Ward 71). In October of 1863, he made a rare comment on his lecture piece: “‘The great merit,’ he asserted, ‘is that it contains so many things that do not have anything to do with it’” (Branch 955).

After successfully giving his lecture in rural districts throughout New England, Browne opened his show at Clinton Hall in New York City on December 23, 1861. Despite a scanty audience due to a severe snowstorm, his humor was warmly received and he formally began his lecture tour. His itinerary was exhausting but thorough in his appearances. After appearing twice in New York City, he journeyed back to Norwich. He lectured in several towns and cities in Connecticut, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Vermont, New Jersey, Rochester, Buffalo, and Utica, New York. These tour dates were accomplished in the space of only about a month (Seitz 100-07). In late January to mid-February of 1862, Browne expanded his lecture tour to include Milwaukee, Toledo, Cleveland, Portland, Maine, Detroit and Adrian, Michigan (Reed, First Lecture 572). By May 29th, 1862, Browne had completed his first season by lecturing again in Massachusetts, Vermont, and Wisconsin (573).

Browne’s second lecture tour of 1862 to 1863 was helped in great part by the newspapers’ report of President Lincoln’s enjoyment of Browne’s first book in late September of 1862. Additionally, it was helped by the book’s successful publication of over forty thousand copies “outright” in May of 1862; this was an enormous success for its time (Sloane, Heritage

33). A week after its publication, Vanity Fair “honored its ex-editor with a first-page cartoon showing ‘Artemus Ward as Popular Lecturer,’ which he had become” (Seitz 120).



The real Artemus Ward lecturing, as depicted in *Vanity Fair*, 24 May 1862

Fig. 2. Illustration from E. P. Hingston, The Genial Showman (1870. Barre, MA: Imprint Society, 1971) xiii.

This cartoon, showing the real “Artemus Ward” is quite different in appearance from his fictional old showman. The success of this volume made it easier for him “to pick his ground for platform work,” and he did this with great skill (120). Touring a considerable portion of the Eastern states and going as far west as Chicago and as far south as Memphis, Tennessee, he was his own press agent and “his easy intimacy with the profession and liking for the printing trade

made him steer for the newspaper-office as soon as he reached a town” asking cordially and familiarly for advertising (120-21).

It is to be noted that his lecturing schedule was prosperous at the physical cost of being grueling. “Through four such seasons, each lasting roughly from October to June, and through part of another, Browne lectured almost every night except Sunday, even including holidays” (Pullen 55). As his fame grew, he was able to move away from the “lyceum circuit to the big-city halls and theaters, [and] he was able to remain in one place for as long as a week, sometimes longer” (55). Despite playing in cities and towns, he hardly overlooked “any community where there was an audience large enough to make the lecture a paying proposition” (55).

In this second season, he changed the title of his lecture to “Sixty Minutes in Africa” (Hingston, Panorama 38). Purposefully, the lecture itself was still the same, with Browne interspersing it “here and there with a few fresh jokes, incidental to new topics of the times” (37). Although Browne had obviously never been to Africa, nevertheless, he had a map of the continent made and on a few occasions, had it suspended behind him in the lecture-room (38). Using a roll of papers or a lady’s riding-whip for a burlesque of pointed instruction, he gravely began his lecture with long pauses between sentences. These pauses allowed the audience to laugh, but he deliberately seemed to be completely oblivious to their laughter. He began:

I have invited you to listen to a discourse upon Africa. Africa is my subject. It is a very large subject. It has the Atlantic Ocean on its left side, the Indian Ocean on its right, and more water than you could measure out at its smaller end . . . Here in the center of the African continent is what is called a ‘howling wilderness,’ but for my part I never heard it howl, or met with any one who has. (Hingston, Panorama 39)

The public responded with continued laughter at the rest of his program. But Hingston watched Browne's eyes and saw that "they were keenly fixed upon his audience, and that he carefully watched the manner in which every sentence was received. Never once did he allow his countenance to relax from its continuous grave expression" (Hingston, Genial Showman 105). Instead of reacting with enjoyable satisfaction at the laugh he made with the audience, "he seemed to wonder whence it had arisen, and to be slightly annoyed that he could not speak without being laughed at" (105). Then like his "Babes" lecture, he concluded by saying:

Africa is my subject. You wish me to tell you something about Africa. Africa is on the map. It's on all the maps of Africa I have ever seen. You may buy a good map of Africa for a dollar. If you will study well you will know more about Africa than I do. It is a comprehensive subject—too vast, I assure you, for me to enter upon to-night. You would not wish me to—I feel that—I feel it deeply and I am very sensitive. If you go home and go to bed—it will better for you than to go with me to Africa! (Seitz 122)

Once the Civil War had begun, the South was closed to lecturing by Browne; and his lecture circuits were substantially lessened (Hingston, Panorama 42). Therefore, he decided to tour California for the start of his 1863-64 lecturing season. His reputation across the United States to California was widespread thanks to the publication of his book and his Ward letters in newspapers throughout the country.

In the summer of 1863, he received a telegram from Thomas McGuire, the owner of the Opera House in San Francisco and several other theaters. McGuire wanted Browne to give his lecture in California and also wanted to know his salary requirements, expecting at the time to get a response that would be negotiated of roughly ten thousand dollars. It simply read, "What will you take for forty nights in California?" (Hingston, Genial Showman 111). Browne's

answer was only three words long, "Brandy and water" (112). This answer was such a shock to McGuire that he shared it with the news reporters who made it into a paragraph and then the inquiry and answer "found their way over the continent" (112). Therefore, when Browne did visit California, he saw that his telegraphic answer had "resulted in one of the very best advertisements he could have possibly devised. The joke was precisely of that description which appealed to the fancy of the gold-diggers, and to the mirthful spirits of California, Oregon, and Nevada" (112-13).

In advertising himself for his California tour, Browne wisely had Hingston as his agent purposely go to each city ahead of his arrival, armed with posters, lithograph portraits of the lecturer, and copies of his book, all of which were intended as presentations to "editors, civic functionaries, and clergymen" (Hingston, Genial Showman 115). Bret Harte gave his promise of the support of the literary weekly, Golden Era (Pullen 73). Additionally, Hingston made good use of the San Francisco barroom bulletin boards, which were often ahead of the newspapers in reporting news from the East (73).

It is of note that Browne's posters were universally the same. Of his own design, he sought an advertisement that "was simple, quaint, striking, and well adapted to the purpose" (Hingston, Panorama 31). Each was of just "one large sheet, with a black ground, and the letters cut out in the block, so as to print white. The reading was "ARTEMUS WARD WILL SPEAK A PIECE" (31). At this time, to the mind of the average American this was very funny from its "childish absurdity" (31). Actually, any boy or girl who read it knew that some kind of a lesson or amusement would be recited; and this "seemed to harmonize admirably with the idea of the 'Babes in the Wood'" (Hingston, Genial Showman 98). Therefore, wherever it was seen, the

reader would give his attention, smile, and realize that it referred to an intention to be “quaintly humorous” (98).

Foregoing McGuire’s offer, Hingston booked Browne into Platt’s Hall on November 13, 1863. His success required the presence of the police to maintain order as the pressure of the crowd caused the money-taker’s stall to overturn; and though men holding hats were put at the entrance to collect admissions, “one of the hats burst under the weight of the silver dollars thrown into it” (Pullen 74). He toured in other halls in San Francisco, Stockton, Sacramento, “flourishing cities, mining camps among the mountains, and ‘new-placers’ besides gold-bedded rivers” (Hingston, Panorama 43). These tours took him well into December. His achievement as a comedic lecturer was of a magnitude that when he left Sacramento on December 17th, 1863, the majority of its legislature passed a bill requesting him to give another lecture in that city (Pullen 77).

Despite the known threats of Indian attacks and the dangers of crossing the Sierra Nevada and the Rocky Mountains by stagecoach and then finally with a horse-drawn sleigh in the fierce winter, Browne was determined to lecture in Nevada and in Salt Lake City, Utah (Pullen 45). In late December of 1863, Browne arrived in Nevada’s Virginia City, which was established in the great silver boom of the early 1860s (79). He gave his “Babes in the Wood” lecture in McGuire’s Opera House on the evening of December 22; and because the house could not fit everyone who wanted to get in, he gave another show on the evening of Christmas Day (80). Sent from the city’s newspaper, the Daily Territorial Enterprise to cover the lecture, Mark Twain described Browne’s lecturing success and, one may infer, his observation of Browne’s productively amiable humor:

There are perhaps fifty subjects treated in it, and there is a passable point in every one of them, and a hearty laugh also for any of God's creatures who have committed no crime, the ghastly memory of which debars him from smiling again while he lives. The man who is capable of listening to the Babes in the Woods from beginning to end without laughing, either inwardly or outwardly, must have done murder, or at least meditated it, at some point during his life. (Branch 955)

Indeed, Jared Graham, a printer and journalist for the Virginia City Union, was present and noted that the lecture was "a continuous string of grotesque and absurd witticisms—so keen, dry and far-fetched that for a moment no one could see a point, and each time a laugh was due the lecturer would pause until it came. With the first guffaw the audience seemed to catch on, and then it would go off like a corn-popper" (Graham 142). Seated in the "printers' pew" reserved for newspapermen, Graham was next to and observed Twain. He saw that Twain watched with his mouth wide open for the entire length of the lecture; and after each general uproar of laughter had subsided, Twain would emit a "spasmodic 'Haw, haw, haw!' unreserved as if from a burro corral, [this] would attract all eyes to the 'pew,' and at each interruption Artemus paused again, and glaring in mock anger, said 'Has it been watered today?'" (143).

Browne did not invent the deadpan manner, but he was apparently the first to use it in his lectures and perhaps the first to discover its power as the foundation for a whole type of humor (Austin, Ward 104). The expressionless pose had been used by stage actors, and Browne may have acquired the initiative from his friend Dan Setchell, "whose facial contortions were perhaps his chief stock in trade in low comedy" (104). "Browne's pose was that of a babe in the wood who did not realize that he was funny" (104). As he performed in Virginia City, William Wright, who wrote under the name Dan De Quille described what he saw:

The serious manner and solemn face assumed by Artemus Ward added not a little to the fun of his impromptu “quaints.” A stranger would gaze at the man for a moment in blank amazement. Then the oddity of the thing would prove too much for him and he would be obliged to “let go all holds” and indulge in a regular explosion of laughter—Artemus the while, more solemn than ever, gazing from face to face, as though astonished and somewhat hurt at being interrupted by the sudden outburst of merriment. He worked this trick with telling effect in his lectures. He had wonderful control of his facial muscles, and could make his face absolutely wooden. Nothing could surprise him into a laugh at such times, or even into the slightest approach to a smile. (104)

The calculated pause, “the wooden expression,” and the hesitancy required perfect rapport with the audience; and it was his sense of this connection that was possibly Browne’s most amazing gift (Austin, Ward 104). One of his auditors who had seen many orators and actors had never seen anyone exhibit such a perfect example of “magnetic control” (104-05). He had complete power over his audiences and was able to toy and experiment with them, while at the same time able to perfect his technique and develop new tricks (105).

Aside from the profits, Browne’s western tour would give him new materials for use in later lectures (Tandy 139). His talks with people of different backgrounds included his conversations with “Mexicans, Piute Indians, stage drivers, Mormon saints, miners, and gamblers” (140). After giving a successful lecture in Salt Lake City in front of Brigham Young and the Mormons, he departed Utah for the East and delivered “lectures in Denver, St. Louis, Peoria, Chicago, and other and smaller way stations on the road to New York” (140). He returned with a new book on his travels along with a new lecture on the Mormons. G. W. Carleton published the book, Artemus Ward; His Travels in 1865.

Before Browne reached Utah, he gave a lecture in Austin, in the Nevada territory. He had made friends with two miners earlier in the day that agreed to distribute his handbills to the adjacent mining camps (Hingston, *Genial Showman* 288). Browne also noticed that accompanying the miners was a Shoshonee Indian who agreed to have a handbill pinned to his sheepskin. The inspiration occurred to Browne that when he returned to New York, he would get “a dozen Indians to deliver bills. We’ll arm them with tomahawks, and give them umbrellas to carry” (288). As a result, he arranged for the October 17, 1864 opening of his lecture show to be “[h]eralded by a riotous procession down Broadway of a dozen Bowery Irishmen ludicrously costumed as fake American Indians and carrying tomahawks, bows and arrows, and enormous white linen umbrellas imprinted in huge letters ‘Artemus Ward—His Indians—Dodworth Hall’” (Dahl 476).

Our noble savages on parade in Broadway; illustration from *The Genial Showman* in which Bowery Irishmen parade as Artemus Ward Indians; the real Artemus looks on, accompanied by E. P. Hingston



Fig. 3. Illustration from E. P. Hingston, *The Genial Showman* (1870. Barre, MA: Imprint Society, 1971) xxiv.

This form of self-promotion was part of another advertising success: the program pamphlet itself with “four octavo pages teemed with wit and included this important bit of personal statistics: ‘Traveler.---How long was Artemus Ward in California?’ ‘Five feet ten and a half’” (Seitz 166). The program was an intentional satire of the little pamphlets that were usually sold for “fifteen or twenty cents and which listed the ‘cast’ of the show, described the outstanding scenes, and reprinted favorable reviews from newspapers” (Dahl 484). Browne’s program pamphlet listed the members of his company as a “Crankist,” who managed the panorama’s movement, a “Moppist,” a “Doortendist” and the others, with Ward himself listed as a “Gas Man” (484). It also states “The panorama used to illustrate Mr. WARD’S Narrative is rather worse than Panoramas usually are” and that “Artemus Ward delivered Lectures before ALL THE CROWNED HEADS OF EUROPE [then in miniscule type] ever thought of delivering lectures” (485). One of the most humorous of newspaper endorsement parodies was the following:

It was a grand scene, Mr. Artemus Ward standing on the platform, talking, many of the audience sleeping tranquilly in their seats; others, leaving the room and not returning; others crying like a child at some of the jokes—all, all formed a most impressive scene, and showed the powers of this remarkable orator. And when he announced that he should never lecture in that town again, the applause was absolutely deafening. (485)

EGYPTIAN HALL,
PICCADILLY.

Every Night (except Saturday) at 8.

SATURDAY MORNINGS AT 3.

ARTEMUS WARD

AMONG THE MORMONS.

During the Vacation the Hall has been carefully Swept out,
and a new Door-Knob has been added to the Door.

MR. ARTEMUS WARD *will call on the Citizens of London, at their residences,
and explain any jokes in his narrative which they may not understand.*

A person of long-established integrity will take excellent care of Bonnets,
Cloaks, etc., during the Entertainment; the Audience better leave their
money, however, with Mr. WARD; he will return it to them in a day or
two, or invest it for them in America as they may think best.

203

Fig. 4. Illustration from Artemus Ward's Panorama. (As exhibited at the Egyptian Hall,
London). (New York: G. W. Carleton, 1869) 203.

It requires a large number of Artists to produce this Entertainment. The casual observer can form no idea of the quantity of unfettered genius that is soaring, like a healthy Eagle, round this Hall in connection with this Entertainment. In fact, the following gifted persons compose the

Official Bureau.

Secretary of the Exterior	Mr. E. P. Hingston.
Secretary of the Treasury.....	Herr Max Field, (Pupil of Signor Thomaso Jacksoni.)
Mechanical Director and Professor of Carpentry.....	Signor G. Wilsoni.
Crankist	Mons. Aleck'
Assistant Crankist	Boy (orphan).
Artists	Messrs. Hilliard & Maeder.
Reserved Chairists.....	Messrs. Persee & Jerome.
Moppist	Signorina O'Flaherty.
Broomist.....	Mlle. Topsia de St. Moke.
Hired Man	John.
Fighting Editor	Chevalier McArone.
Dutchman	By a Polish Refugee, named McFinnigin.
Doortendist	Mons. Jacques Ridera.
Gas Man	Artemus Ward.

This Entertainment will open with music. The Soldiers' Chorus from
"Faust." First time in this city.

Next comes a jocund and discursive preamble, calculated to show what a good education the Lecturer has.

View the first is a sea-view.—Ariel navigation.—Normal school of whales in the distance.—Isthmus of Panama.—Interesting interview with Old Panama himself, who makes all the hats. Old Pan. is a likely sort of man.

San Francisco.—City with a vigilant government.—Miners allowed to vote. Old inhabitants so rich that they have legs with golden calves to them.

Fig. 5. Illustration from Artemus Ward's Panorama. (As exhibited at the Egyptian Hall, London). (New York: G. W. Carleton, 1869) 210.

The subject of this humorous lecture was “Artemus Ward Among the Mormons” (Dahl 476). With reference to the title, his commercial success must also be attributed to the humorous printing on each ticket that simply said, “ARTEMUS WARD AMONG THE MORMONS. *Admit the Bearer and ONE Wife*” (Hingston, Genial Showman 342).

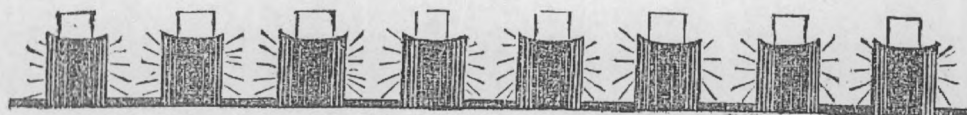
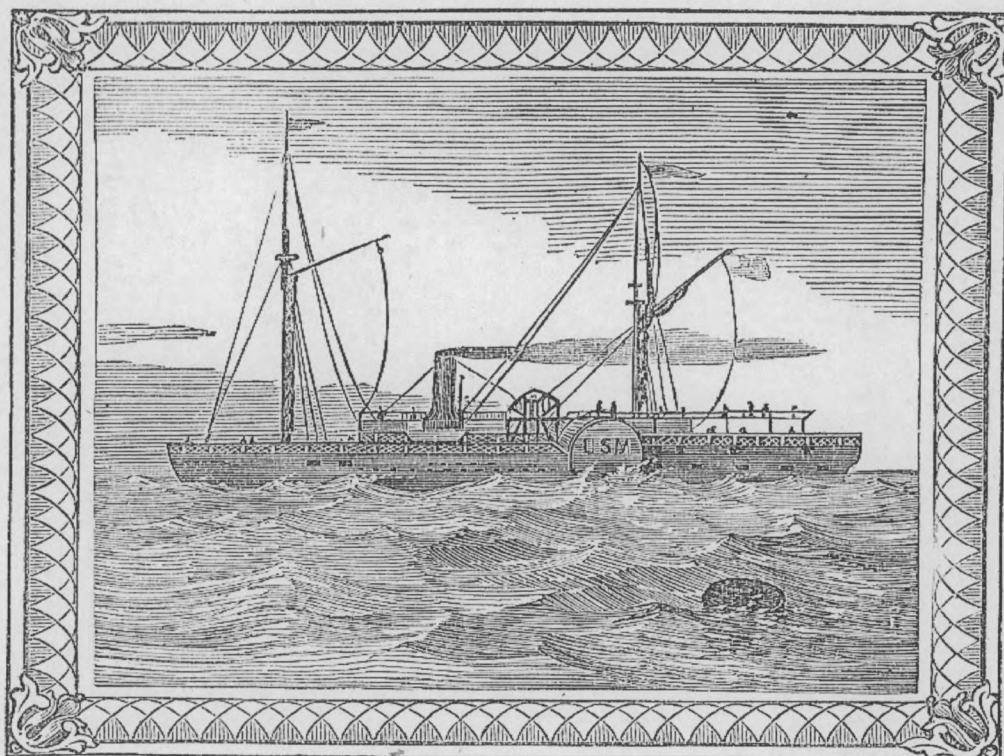
A popular form of entertainment beginning in the 1840s was the use of a panorama. This was a “device by which vistas of famous scenes were painted on long strips of canvas, wound on rollers, and so slowly passed across a stage” (Seitz 163). There were two main types of moving panorama that were popular in America in the mid-nineteenth century: California gold mine scenes with the “experiences of the Forty-niners”; and displays of “the vast expanses of natural scenery” with travels across the great rivers of America (Dahl 479). Browne was the first and the most successful lecturer to have used a panorama that was itself comic; it was to be a burlesque of its “serious predecessors” (476).

Ironically, Browne had a staid and well-painted picture created and he used it for his shows in New York City, but its great size proved unwieldy for easy handling (Dahl 478). Secondly, he knew that the New England audiences had grown more tired of sober panoramas than those in New York. Therefore, he had the idea of creating a comic panorama. He ordered that it be detestably painted and to ensure this particular goal, he painted some of the pictures himself (478-79). Of his talent, he would boast with deadpan humor in his lectures that the pictures were done “by the Old Masters. It was the last thing they did before dying. They did this and then they expired” (479). As a result, his lectures “caught fire” in New England and his return engagement in New York in 1865 was a “smash hit” (478).

The use of the panorama aided his lectures’ success in several ways. While the panorama did roughly display an accurate and informative record of his Western tour, he poked fun at the

usual panoramas. Instead of a scene of the “lordly Mississippi stern-wheeler, Ward pictures the miserable little steamboat in which he sailed to Panama” (Dahl 482).

THE STEAMER “ARIEL.”

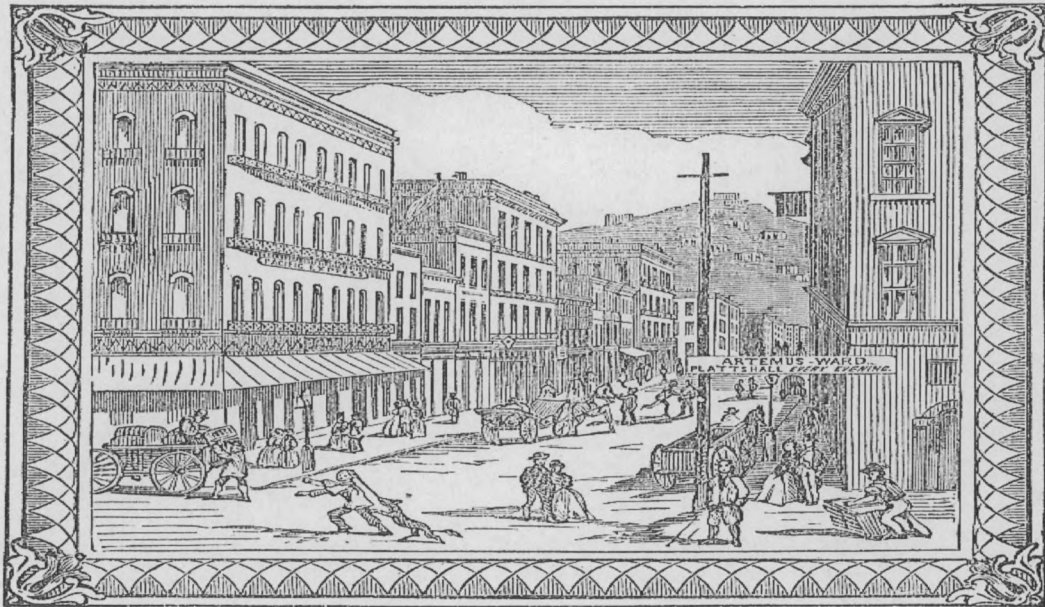


One of the United States Mail line of Steamers from New York to Aspinwall. Being a supplemental boat only, its arrangements were none of the best.

Fig. 6. Illustration from Artemus Ward's Panorama. (As exhibited at the Egyptian Hall, London). (New York: G. W. Carleton, 1869) 74.

Similar to California panoramas, Browne shows a scene in “broad Montgomery Street in the burgeoning city of San Francisco. But any grandeur the view might have is undercut by the central point of interest of the picture—a small dog vigorously pulling at a terrified Chinaman’s pigtail” (Dahl 482).

MONTGOMERY STREET, SAN FRANCISCO.



The main street of the chief city of California. It is built over what was a few years ago a portion of the Bay of San Francisco. In digging up a part of the street, some time since, the excavators came upon the hull of an old vessel full of chests of tea. The Chinaman in the foreground was pointed out by the lecturer preparatory to his remarks on the Chinese theatre.

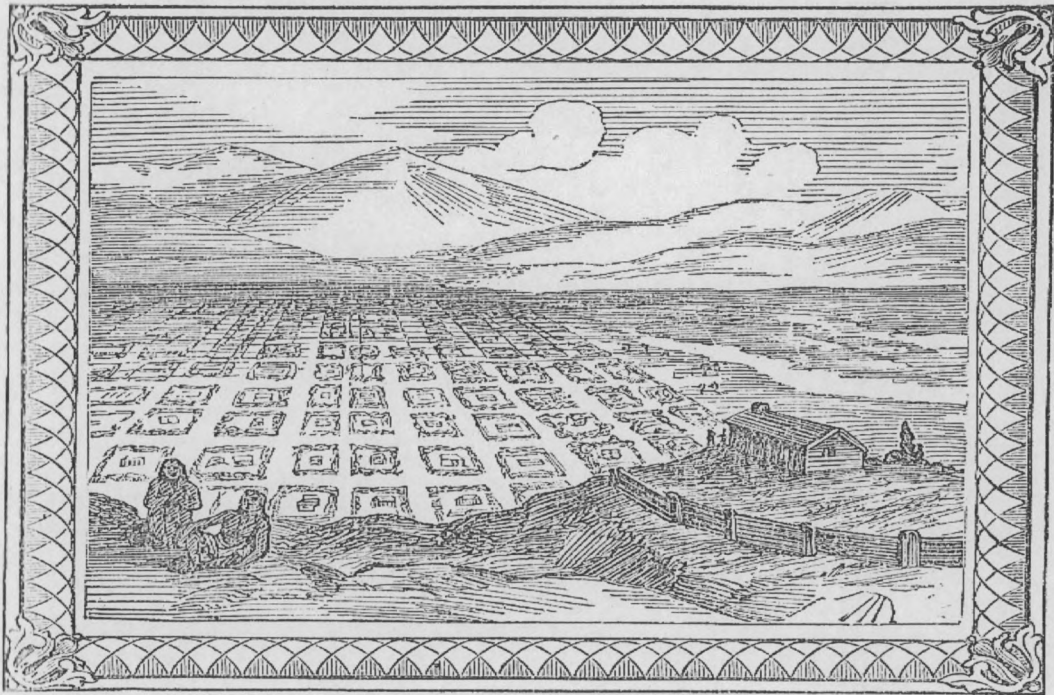
78

Fig. 7. Illustration from Artemus Ward's Panorama. (As exhibited at the Egyptian Hall, London). (New York: G. W. Carleton, 1869) 78.

Browne also conceived the type of views of the new Salt Lake City. They were painted exactly in the practice of the staid moving panorama, yet the “picture of the city from heights behind it make it look like nothing more than a checkerboard” (Dahl 482).

SALT LAKE CITY.

FROM THE HEIGHTS BEHIND IT.

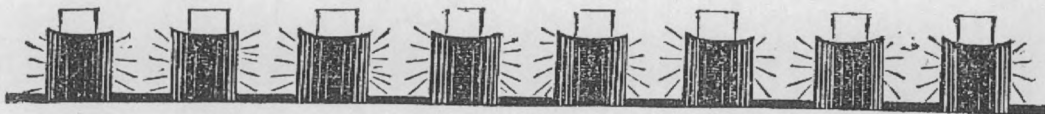
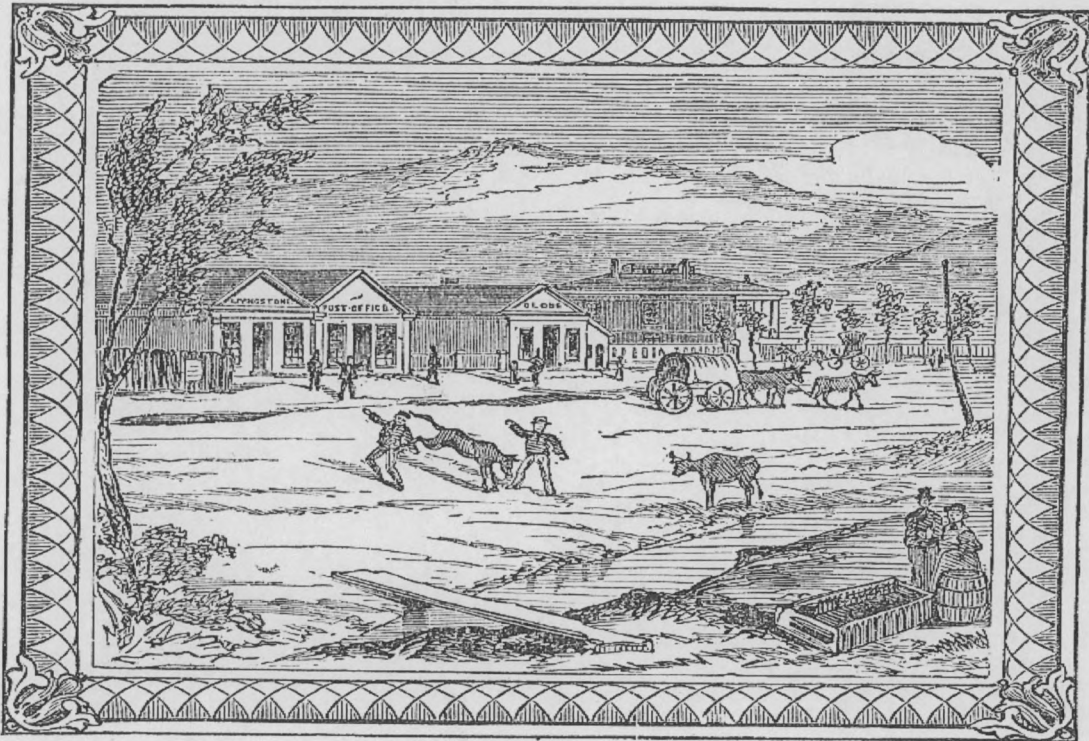


The building in the foreground is the Mormon arsenal. To the right, in the mid-distance, is the River Jordan, flowing from Lake Utah to the Salt Lake. The valley through which the Jordan flows is one of the most fertile on the North American continent.

Fig. 8. Illustration from Artemus Ward's Panorama. (As exhibited at the Egyptian Hall, London). (New York: G. W. Carleton, 1869) 95.

Humorously, the Main Street of Salt Lake City is shown as a “vast desert with a few cows wandering about. In the center a man is being kicked in the belly by a mule” (Dahl 482).

MAIN STREET, SALT LAKE CITY.

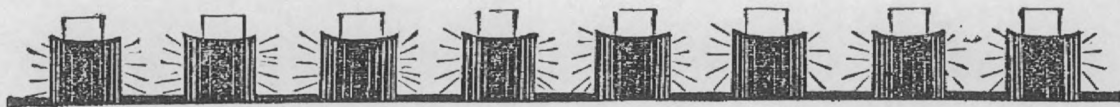


The building to the extreme right is the House of Legislature, where the representatives of the territory of Utah hold their meetings. The second house on the right is the Post Office. Main Street is 132 feet in breadth.

Fig. 9. Illustration from Artemus Ward's Panorama. (As exhibited at the Egyptian Hall, London). (New York: G. W. Carleton, 1869) 121.

Another painting is humorously distorted by showing a “giant Artemus Ward, attacked on one side by a huge bear and on the other by enormous wolves” just below the top of the mountains (Dahl 483).

THE ENDOWMENT HOUSE.



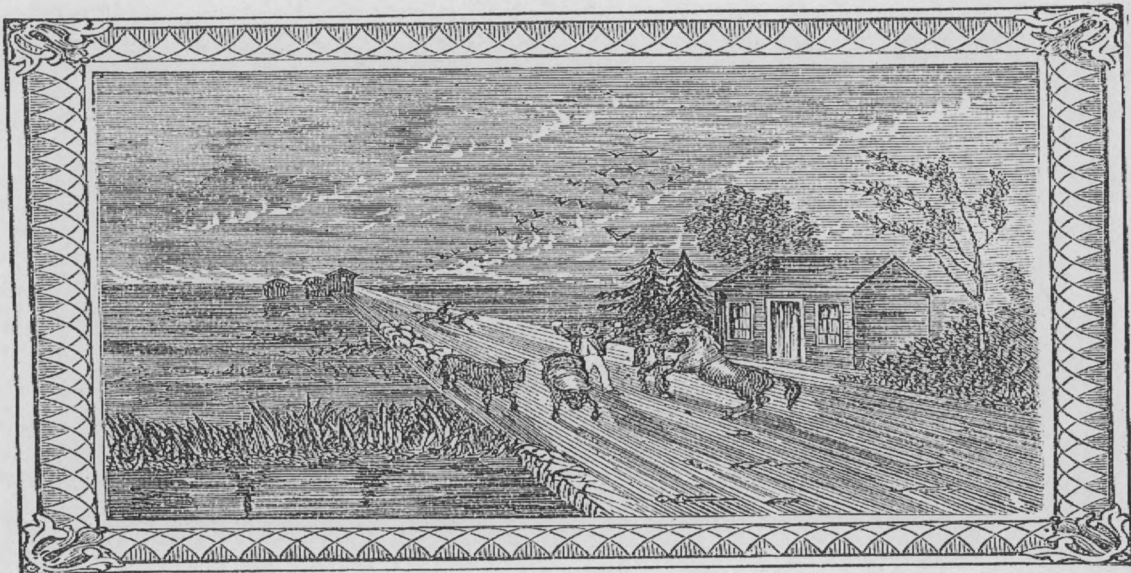
That which takes place within this building travellers may guess at but are not permitted to know. It is where the Mormon marriages are celebrated. On the mountain above a figure out of all proportion to the scenery is supposed to represent Artemus Ward attacked by a bear in front and a pack of wolves in the rear.

Fig. 10. Illustration from Artemus Ward's Panorama. (As exhibited at the Egyptian Hall, London). (New York: G. W. Carleton, 1869) 161.

Browne took advantage of the opportunity to give light-hearted humor to the “dioramic spectacles customary in most of the humorless panoramas” (Dahl 483). Browne also had “his prairie fire raging across the plains in catastrophic fury. Only in Ward’s show it would flare up in the wrong places, skip around in an impossible manner, and even ‘unburn’ parts of the scene” (483). Browne as Ward would emphasize to the audience’s enjoyment that the real prairie fires “usually burn better than mine is burning to-night” (Ward, *Panorama*, 186). He also enjoyed the joke of letting the fire go out sporadically, and then allowing it to reignite itself (193).

THE PRAIRIE ON FIRE.

CONTINUED.

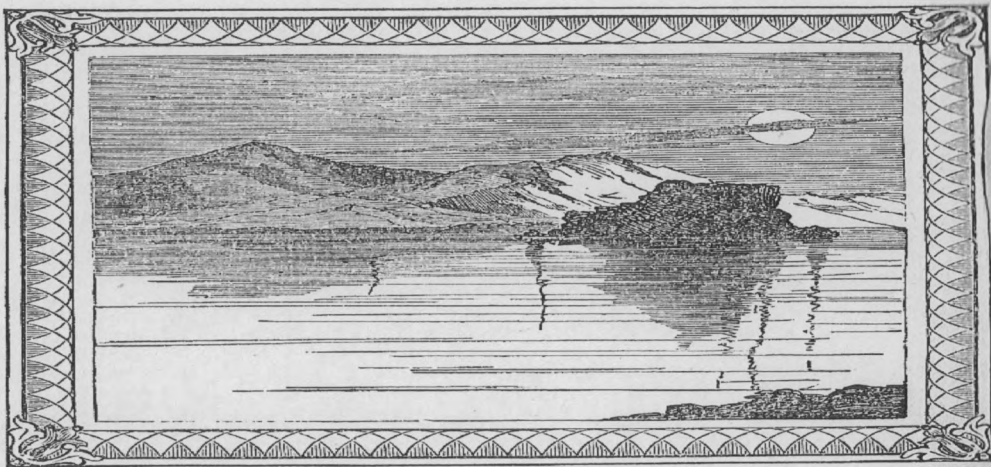


The effect of the Prairie being on Fire was illustrated in the panorama by means of a revolving cloth behind; a portion of the picture being transparent.

Fig. 11. Illustration from Artemus Ward’s Panorama. (As exhibited at the Egyptian Hall, London). (New York: G. W. Carleton, 1869) 189.

In the normal panorama's moving entertainment, a moon would rise across a sunset sky (Dahl 484). In the usual dioramic way, Browne's painting made the moon's track transparent and an assistant put the moon "on" by using a lantern from behind the painting. But instead of rising naturally, Browne's moon deliberately "jigged and jogged" until Browne himself went behind the platform to straighten out the assistant in this task (484). Yet once he did this, the moon's movements would allude to the argument that he was obviously having with his assistant by becoming "nervous and flickering, dancing up and down in the most inartistic and undecided manner" (Ward, *Panorama*, 159). The lecturer would apologize to his audience and in mock anger would "be most happy to pay a good salary to any respectable boy of good parentage and education who is a good moonist" (159). As a result, his "moon scene" became "one of the best laughed-at parts of the entertainment" (159).

PART OF THE GREAT SALT LAKE.



It is situated in the north-eastern corner of Utah Territory, to the north-west of the valley of Salt Lake and about eighteen miles from the city. Its length is nearly seventy miles; its breadth from thirty to thirty-five miles. (N.B.—This is the moon in the management of which Artemus Ward's "moonist" was apt to experience difficulty.)

Fig. 12. Illustration from Artemus Ward's Panorama. (As exhibited at the Egyptian Hall, London). (New York: G. W. Carleton, 1869) 152.

Most of the usual panoramic shows had music being played that would obviously have to fit the subject under discussion (Dahl 484). Browne cleverly had his pianist play the most incompatible “tunes possible—soft ditties during scalping scenes, martial arts during sentimental scenes” (484). At one point, Browne attempted to tell a tearful romance, beginning with the words, “On a beautiful June morning—some sixteen years ago—“ (Ward, Panorama 180). Then the pianist began to play music very loudly, deliberately drowning him out but seemingly unaware of his actions. Browne continued to narrate “in excited dumb show—his lips moving as though he were speaking” (185). The audience laughed unrestrainedly for many minutes. But Browne kept talking until finally the pianist stopped and he concluded, “—and she fainted on Reginald's breast!” (185). Upon realizing that it only heard the first and last sentence of the story, the audience continued to shake with laughter (Dahl 484).

In a letter dated June 5th, 1864, Browne responded to a man who sought his friendship. Ironically, the man's name was Charles Brown. In recounting his life to him, Browne stated, “For the past four years I have lectured almost constantly, and with a success that is perhaps unequaled, considering what a startling innovation I have made on a long-established institution” (Seitz 234). Yet it is fascinating to note that apparently Browne had not intended to lecture professionally for the rest of his life. This goal is noted by the American journalist and politician Henry Watterson, whose later achievements would include his 1919 work “Marse Henry”: An Autobiography.

Watterson had fought for the South during the Civil War and in the spring of 1865, he met Browne in Cincinnati who helped him get a newspaper job (Pullen 155). They met again in

London in the weekend before Christmas of 1866. Watterson later reported that Browne intended to stay in London until the audience attendance began to drop, which it did not in the nearly eight weeks of continual lecturing. Browne then thought he would tour the Continent and after returning to the United States, he would have made enough money to be independent. At this point, he would give up lecturing which he termed a “mountebank business,” a “damnable iteration” of the lecture and do “some real writing” (Pullen 158-59).

Watterson later wrote that Browne had a “great respect for scholarly culture and personal respectability and thought that if he could get time and health he might do something in the ‘high comedy line’” (Pullen 159). Several projects were discussed between them that included a humorous novel, “a series of essays of a more ambitious nature than any he had attempted before, and the possible origination of a new American magazine” (159). The sense by Watterson was that Browne’s “mind was beginning to soar above the showman and merry-maker” (159). Sadly, these literary goals were not to happen as the exhausting lecture tours in America and in England on Browne’s delicate frame already had exasperated his fatal tuberculosis.

In an academic appreciation of the written and spoken word, Browne’s achievements in his time are remarkable. He could have just stayed as a city journalist. He did not. He could have continued writing his Artemus Ward letters and published another book beyond the two already enjoying profits. Again, he did not. He accomplished what apparently no other literary man did in his time. Not satisfied with being a humorous writer of national fame, he dared to use his talents to face different aspects of the public in a deliberate burlesque of the serious lecture with a methodical deadpan delivery of puns, jokes, absurdities, and contemporary observations. The result is that he was a unique and enormous success.

An overall evaluation of Browne must take into consideration how unique he is in terms of other writers and lecturers of the time. What makes him exceptional is that no other literary man used his fame and talent for humorous writing as a springboard to embark on the lecture circuit in an entirely different persona and style, save in name only. He was the first literary comedian to tour widely and successfully throughout the United States in a deliberately humorous burlesque of the serious lecture. Thus, it is possible to conclude that there were very few, if any, men like Browne who in his time, looked at America and experienced and commented on it so expansively.

Within the space of roughly five years, this literary comedian lectured in Maine, on Beacon Hill and down Broadway (Pullen 136). He worked near Lake Erie's shores, and extensively

toured the gold fields, seen terrain as disparate as the Sierras and savannas, crossed the Rockies and down the coasts and along the Ohio and Mississippi. With the exception of the Southwest, he had, in fact, been practically everywhere—by steamboat, train, canal boat, and stagecoach, and on foot. He'd been in big towns and little ones, heard big talk and small talk. He'd known the greats like Mark Twain and Whitman . . . and thousands of never-heard-ofs—farmers, lumbermen, miners, boarding-house landladies, bartenders, cavalymen, boatmen, railway conductors, show people, gamblers, storekeepers, Yankees, Indians, Negroes, Swedes, Germans, Irishmen, all kinds of people, all going by the name '*American.*' (136).

But if the fame seemed at times to consume him, he always brought himself back to reality by visiting the local printshop wherever he toured. He started his professional life as a printer, and once he was again "among the type cases and aproned compositors who greeted him (as one of

them) so cordially, once smelling the ink and touching the familiar tools of the trade, he could feel that he was again a real person” (137). He was a literary professional who knew that humorous writing and speaking were “good, honest craft[s]” (137). In the final analysis, he used his linguistic craftsmanship to bring his particular brand of humor and enjoyment to the eye, ear, and mind of mid-nineteenth century America.

Conclusion

My interest in Artemus Ward began in researching a final paper three years ago on Mark Twain's lecture style. I was astonished that one of the major American humorists gave credit to Browne in his ability of telling a story on stage. In his 1871 lecture, Twain said that Ward was "America's greatest humorist" (Lorch 336). Thus, I became intrigued with exploring who exactly was Artemus Ward.

As luck would have it, I found a first edition of his 1862 book. I began reading one of his letters and I found myself laughing over the cacography and intelligent humor of Ward's persona, the old showman. I wanted to examine his accomplishments and also to find out why he was billed as "The Man Who Made Lincoln Laugh" (Pullen 1).

When Browne as Ward came to London and gave his "piece" in Egyptian Hall in 1866, the English author Charles Reade called him "Artemus the delicious" (Seitz 209). Similarly, there is a "delicious" academic satisfaction in immersing myself in the study of an American whose written and spoken achievements are largely unknown today.

With the passage of time and topics of the day, the once well-known Charles Farrar Browne and his literary creation Artemus Ward have been largely forgotten. The purpose of this thesis is to investigate the reasons for his extraordinary success as a comedic writer and lecturer in the mid-nineteenth century. From an analytical perspective, a consideration of his wit requires a student of American literature to appreciate the subtlety of his uses of language in its historical context. His rhetorically gentle humor appealed to all of his diverse readers and audiences throughout the United States and in England. This attraction was that it effectively did not bring offense to its varied targets, but still gave intelligent and reflective observations on the national topics of the day.

The strength of his humor was based on the fact that he did not allow his audience to feel that they were laughing at that which they should feel embarrassed for being amused (Hingston, Panorama, 48). His good-natured humor served a greater end for his fellow citizen, and it is that if in “making them laugh he could also cause them to see through a sham, be ashamed of some silly national prejudice or suspicions of the value of some current piece of political bunkum, so much the better” (27). The intelligence of his humor was such that his audiences “felt that it was no fool who wore the cap and bells so excellently” (48).

At the first night of Browne’s performance in New York on October 17th, 1864, no less a literary figure than the poet William Cullen Bryant attended the lecture, and he remarked in his Evening Post—“Artemus has a style of his own, which no lecturer has yet discovered. He says so many funny things that the audience sometimes let a ‘goak’ slip by unnoticed, and then Artemus will pause for a moment, with a downcast expression, till a sudden guffaw tells him that somebody has seen the point” (Hotton 35). Browne’s primary purpose in his writing and speaking professions was to make people laugh. Indeed, his unique humor caused laughter as a brief respite in the midst of the national tragedy of the Civil War.

Browne was the first literary comedian to bring American humor to a national prestige of respect on the lecture circuit in this country and finally in England. While successfully raising the nation’s awareness of the importance and power of humor, he stimulated his readers’ and audiences’ imagination in reflection of the country’s social and political topics. It is these accomplishments of Browne and the humor of his Artemus Ward that make him a worthy topic of study.

There is no doubt that Browne was indeed the unofficial jester of the Civil War period. David Ross Locke’s *Petroleum V. Nasby* was “too partisan to represent the entire North” and

Henry Wheeler Shaw's Josh Billings was "just becoming known" (Austin, Ward 107). Also, Robert Henry Newell's Orpheus C. Kerr "did not have the wide popular appeal" of Artemus Ward (107). Browne was the nation's literary comedian prior to Mark Twain. He was also instrumental in getting Twain's story "The Jumping Frog of Calaveras County" published in the East during the mid-1860s. The success of this story began Twain's rise to fame. Furthermore, by seeing Browne as Ward on stage, Twain was awakened to the possibilities of pursuing humorous writing and speaking professionally. Moreover, Twain adopted a similar lecture style to that of Browne's as he delivered nearly a thousand lectures throughout the world in his career.

To say that Twain's career eclipsed that of Browne's is an obvious fact. But it can be fairly claimed that Browne was an important and forgotten impetus to Twain. The question arises as to what would have happened to American literary history had Browne lived to write more scholarly essays, a new American magazine, and even a novel in a "high comedy line" (Pullen 159). Additionally, if Browne had reached any of these goals, how would his presence have affected Twain and his subsequent work? Would he perhaps have been his rival—especially in the venue of the comic lecturer? But the reality is that these questions are forever academically closed, however poignant they are in consideration.

Symbolically though, it is quite ironic to note that when the *Deutschland* vessel was carrying the body of Browne into New York Harbor on May 31st, 1867, there was another ship about to leave and advertised as an "Excursion to Paris, Italy, Greece, Crimea, Holy Land, Egypt, etc. THE MAGNIFICENT SIDE-WHEEL OCEAN STEAMSHIP QUAKER CITY" (Pullen 166). Mark Twain was on this ship, and his experiences would launch his first major success, The Innocents Abroad (166). On the other hand, Charles Ferrar Browne's ship had

reached its final port. Nevertheless, through an analysis and a new awareness of his humor, his reputation should not be forgotten.

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