

Platform Cards
Stephen E. Towne
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On November 26, 1861, stand-up comedy was born in New London, Connecticut. Its parent was a young man named Charles Farrar Browne. The birth occurred in the midst of the American Civil War, a period of unprecedented horror, stress, and fear in the United States. As well as prompting a new birth of freedom by destroying chattel slavery, the titanic conflict generated unforeseen by-products in society and culture. The emergence of stand-up comedic performance was an outgrowth of comic journalism that flourished in American newspapers at the time. Newspaper writers moved their comedy to the stage as society loosened the strictures of puritanical seriousness then prevalent throughout the nation.

My essay this evening will introduce some of the first newspaper writers who transferred their humor to the platform. Though they were wildly popular comics in their day, their names are largely unfamiliar to most Americans today. They were Charles Farrar Brown, Henry Wheeler Shaw, and David Ross Locke. They wrote and performed as, respectively, Artemus Ward, Josh Billings, and Petroleum Vesuvius Nasby. Their performance styles were radically different from each other. But each served as a model for platform artists to come. In turn, these later performers, some of whose names were Mark Twain, Bill Nye, and James Whitcomb Riley, the last a member of our Literary Club, set the standard for comedic performance into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Newspaper humor has a long history in North America. Benjamin Franklin is commonly considered the forebear of comic journalism in America when he wrote his Silence Dogood letters for his newspaper, his hoaxes or tall-tales about Hessian soldiers and edicts from the king of Prussia written

during the War of Independence, and even his Poor Richard pieces in his almanacs. Other newspapermen were Seba Smith who lampooned Maine legislators in the 1830s, Johnson J. Hooper of Alabama who created a rogue named Simon Suggs, and poet James Russell Lowell of Boston, who with his *Biglow Papers* attacked the United States war with Mexico in the late 1840s. Mid-nineteenth century newspapers were full of humor pieces—poetry, stories, editorials—and the three figures I profile had many models to choose from.

Of the three performers, Charles Farrar Brown¹ must be considered the most important of the Civil War-era platform comics. He was born in poverty in Maine in 1834. After his father died his mother sent him to work at age thirteen in a newspaper office. By the age of seventeen he was editor of a short-lived temperance newspaper. After a short stint as a printer and author of a few pieces for a comic newspaper in Boston, he worked on a paper in Toledo, Ohio. In 1857, at twenty-three, he became the local editor of the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, an important regional daily. His job entailed hunting for bits of news around town and writing them up. On slow news days Brown would pen filler pieces, which sometimes were humorous stories or short fictional tales.

It was after a slow news day that on January 30, 1858, Brown published his first Artemus Ward letter in the *Plain Dealer*. The writer, the reader quickly learned, was in “show bizniss” and traveled displaying live animals and wax figures: “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.” He asked the editor to “git up a tremenjus excitement in yr. paper ‘bowt my onparaled Show... all

¹ Note to reader: When Brown started lecturing he added an “e” to his name and went by “Browne.” Thus, I refer to him as “Brown” before he lectured and “Browne” after he took to the platform.

for 15 cents.” In return, Ward promised that he would have his “hanbills...struck orf up to your printin office.” The letter ended: “P.S.—You scratch my back & Ile scratch your back.”

Brown added another letter from “Artemus Ward” a couple weeks later, in which the showman gives more details about his menagerie and his travels. More Artemus Ward letters appeared in the *Plain Dealer* semi-regularly, and readers lapped them up. Soon newspapers all over the country reprinted the letters and readers everywhere followed the peregrinations of the showman and laughed at his picturesque adventures and readily given opinions. Brown fleshed out details about Ward: he was in his mid-fifties, rotund, bald, had been in showbusiness for 25 years, had a wife named Betsy Jane and a family. “I was born in the state of Maine, of parents,” he wrote. Artemus resided in Baldinsville, Indiana, a fictional burg and the scene of several of his letters. He didn’t spell very well, which added to the enjoyment of reading his letters. He confided that “By attending strickly to bizness I’ve amarsed a handsum Pittance.”

Brown’s Artemus Ward letters increased the circulation of the *Plain Dealer*, and the young author asked his boss to be paid for each installment. But his editor refused, and in late 1860 Brown left Cleveland for New York to write for *Vanity Fair*, a humor monthly, which had already been paying him for Artemus Ward letters. Within months, Brown was editing the magazine, but the publication was in poor financial condition and soon folded.

In New York Brown hung out with actors and writers. He had a yen to go on the stage with some sort of act. His friends encouraged him, and soon he devised a plan. He would hit the lecture circuit billed as Artemus Ward.

Now, to comprehend the rise of stand-up comedy, we need to understand that mid-nineteenth-century American society still had the stamp of colonial-era Calvinist, Protestant, Christian morality imprinted on it. The individual was always to be aware of the condition of her immortal soul. All persons

should be concerned about their relationship with a deity that could fling them into hell in a fit of jealousy. Therefore, when not cultivating their relationship with God, people's minds should be focused on serious matters of societal good and self-improvement. In the 1820s, in this atmosphere of serious-mindedness, when colonial-era laws prohibiting theatrical performances were disappearing only gradually from state statute books, arose an adult-education effort historians have called the lyceum movement. Local groups organized series of lectures, debates, even scientific demonstrations, to engage the minds of both men and women. The idea was to keep people out of theaters, saloons, and other dens of iniquity and to occupy their brains. The aim was to edify individuals and improve community morals. By mid-century a robust system of lectures and presentations developed on the east coast that spread into Midwestern states. Speakers traveled from town to town on an expanding railroad network to address crowds assembled in schools, churches, masonic halls, and other venues. Leading speakers were clerics like Henry Ward Beecher, temperance lecturers like John B. Gough, and abolitionists like Wendell Phillips. They filled halls to capacity. Missionaries gave accounts of their international travels to save souls. Men dubbed "professors" lectured on scientific subjects like chemistry, astronomy, or even, gasp, human anatomy. By mid-century the lyceum movement had faded, but the lecture circuit continued strongly. Entertainment acts also traveled the circuit, provided, of course, that the singing and instrumental music and even theatrical acts were edifying and not morally degenerate. Still, serious lecturers were the norm.

Charles Brown's idea was to bring humor to the lecture circuit billed as Artemus Ward, a name that was famous across the United States. Now, as we know, the character Artemus Ward was middle-aged, fat, and bald. Brown was in his twenties, tall, and pencil thin. He also had lots of hair, which for his performances he curled. The act he devised was to go on stage dressed in a very serious black suit with all the hallmarks of giving a serious lecture. He spoke as a cultured and educated gentleman, not in Artemus Ward's fractured Hoosier English. But things would go wrong. He would get stage fright, would

pause for inordinate lengths, or be distracted by people in the audience and complain about rude interruptions, or become upset and lose his place when people laughed. His delivery was peppered with what his manager called “jerky emphases and off inflexions.” He fashioned a stream-of-consciousness monologue of loosely connected jokes all with little coherence. In short, it was a spoof of lyceum lectures, sermons, and other solemn utterances full of moral seriousness.

The act, begun in November 1861 in Connecticut, was a smash hit. He toured throughout the northern states. Newspaper reviewers noted that it was all complete nonsense but that audiences everywhere were convulsed with laughter. In many ways, their reaction was a cathartic one after years of serious-minded lyceum lectures. As well, the country was in the midst of a terrible civil war, and audiences needed a good laugh. Charles Browne’s Artemus Ward letters and now lectures were a tonic. Indeed, it is famously told that in September 1862 President Abraham Lincoln called a special Cabinet meeting with the intention of announcing his Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation. But first, he read to the group an Artemus Ward letter, “High Handed Outrage at Utica,” from Browne’s recently published book, *Artemus Ward, His Book*. The serious-minded men of the Cabinet were getting hot under the collar at their time being wasted in frivolity. Lincoln apologized to them and said: “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.”

Browne toured all over the northern states and west to California giving his Artemus Ward lectures. It was during his western tour that Browne stopped in Virginia City, Nevada Territory, and there met a young newspaper writer named Samuel Clemens. More on that later. The lectures had titles such as “Babes in the Woods” or “Sixty Minutes in Africa.” But the titles meant nothing as there was no guiding thesis to the performance. Handbills went up in the cities and towns where he would appear saying: “Artemus Ward will speak his piece.” Eager to satirize anything and anyone, his travels through Utah Territory gave him fodder to lampoon Mormon domestic arrangements. One of his jokes was:

“Pretty girls of Utah mostly marry Young.” Later he wrote a short story called “A Mormon Romance,” which began: “The morning on which Reginald Gloverson was to leave Great Salt Lake City with a mule-train dawned beautifully. Reginald Gloverson was a young and thrifty Mormon, with an interesting family of twenty young and handsome wives.” It goes on from there.

For the 1864-65 season, Browne fashioned a lecture based in part on his western trip entitled “Artemus Ward Among the Mormons.” The act played on people’s prurient curiosity about Mormon family life and featured a painted panorama that required a traveling crew to handle. Now, panoramas had become staples of the lyceum lecture circuit, with painted depictions of, say, missionary travels or, more recently, battle scenes of the war then still raging. A long canvas would be unrolled behind a lecturer. But parts of Browne’s Artemus Ward panorama featured out-of-proportion scenes and confusing perspective. He then would apologize for it, disavow it, and insist he hadn’t painted it. Other scenes he would praise highly, excessively, but then some stage apparatus would fail requiring him to go behind the canvas and fix it. He also hired a woman pianist who traveled with the act. She played wildly inappropriate accompaniment that sometimes drowned out the speaker as he told an exciting western story. The act delighted audiences. He gave the lecture in Indianapolis on two nights in March 1865. The newspaper ads, all written by Browne himself, promised “colossal moving paintings” produced by the “brushes of the foremost of living artists” that would “embrace thoroughly faithful views” of, among other things, “Brigham Young’s harem.” In its review, the *Indianapolis Daily Journal* praised the silly panorama and went so far to say that in his “lucid intervals” Artemus Ward imparted real nuggets of information about the west. The *Indianapolis Daily State Sentinel* called the lectures a “perfect success” but described the act in vague and general terms so as not to give away the jokes. You see, early in his lecturing career newspapers had printed verbatim accounts of his performances, prompting Browne to ask editors and reporters not give away his act.

After the war Charles Browne took his Artemus Ward act to England, where he was a huge success. Sadly, he died there in 1867 at the age of 33, at the height of his comic genius, from tuberculosis probably worsened by London's air pollution. His influence as the first stand-up comedian continued, however, and other performers appeared. One was Josh Billings, the *nom de plume* of Henry Wheeler Shaw. Born in 1818 in western Massachusetts, Shaw was expelled from Hamilton College for a prank. After roaming and working odd jobs for several years in the Old Northwest, he returned east and married, and then kicked around some more until he settled in Poughkeepsie, New York as an auctioneer and real estate agent. In 1859, now a middle-aged businessman, just for his personal enjoyment he began to write humorous sketches. He sent them to distant newspapers for publication under pseudonyms. He grew in confidence and started to submit pieces to his hometown papers under the moniker "Si Sledlength." Gradually, Shaw settled on "Josh Billings." His initial fame rested on a short piece published during the Civil War called "Essa on the Muel," which received widespread attention. He started selling humorous articles to newspapers and magazines.

In 1864, Shaw wrote to Charles Browne, a.k.a. Artemus Ward, to ask advice about publishing a book of his sketches. Browne arranged for his own publisher to print Shaw's first book, *Josh Billings, Hiz Sayings*, which was a big success. Shaw packed up his family and moved to New York City where he started as a humor columnist for the *New York Weekly*. He was paid \$100 each week for each column.

Shaw had started to give humorous lectures back in Poughkeepsie in 1863 and took a lecture on tour. He initially failed to click on the lecture circuit. But the next year he received a telegram from Norwich, Connecticut, one of the towns where he had bombed as a lecturer, asking if he would return. This time the house was packed and his appearance was received warmly. His performance career took off, and for the rest of his life he gave fifty to one-hundred lectures each year across the United States.

Shaw's art was different from Charles Browne's as Artemus Ward. Shaw, as Josh Billings, wrote character sketches and short, comic human-interest stories. But his real specialty was as the master of the aphorism, a short, pithy utterance that sometimes expressed humor or sometimes spoke surprising near-profundity in a home-spun way that was popular with American audiences. Examples were:

"Give me liberty, or giv me deth"—but ov the 2 I prefer the liberty.

There is 2 things in this life for which we are never fully prepared, and that iz twins.

No man haz a rit tu be proud till he bekums entirely vartuous, and then he wont feel like being proud.

An ungrateful childe is the revenge of Heaven.

It iz the little things in life that stir us up so mutch; thare iz 10 chances ov being stung bi a hornet whare thare aint one ov being stept on bi an elephant.

Nineteenth-century readers and audiences loved this stuff. Shaw, as Josh Billings, delivered to audiences aphorism-laden lectures that rambled from subject to subject. As such, he is credited as the first master of the one-liner. In 1869 he was signed by James Clark Redpath's Boston Lyceum Bureau to tour all over the country on the lecture circuit, which ran from October to March. Among the titles of his lectures were "Putty and Varnish," "The Pensive Cockroach," "The Probability of Life, Perhaps Rain, Perhaps not," and "Milk." Of course, he spoke on none of those things, but pronounced his aphorisms and other witticisms. In "Buty and the Beasts" he cracked jokes about various animals such as the ant or the dog. In "What i Kno about Hotels" he told stories of touring on the lecture circuit interspersed with bits about farming, whistling, the busy body, the dandy, and contentment.

His performance style and mannerisms were markedly different from Artemus Ward's. Whereas Ward performed a memorized script with spur-of-the-moment improvisations, Billings was different. He

received no introduction but walked nonchalantly onto stage, sat in a chair, opened a handkerchief on his knee, opened his text and read it. He never laughed, he never smiled. He wore a black suit but with no tie. He was very tall and wore his hair very long and swept back in the old-fashioned way. A gregarious man, on tour he had to resist hanging out in hotel lobbies and other meeting places in the towns where he appeared.

Shaw wrote several books which contain his carefully crafted aphorisms. He continued on the lecture circuit until 1884, when his health failed. He died in California in the following year while there to restore his health.

Another pioneer of stand-up comedy was David Ross Locke. Born in Broome County in upstate New York in 1833, he started work in newspaper offices at the age of twelve. He obtained his first editing job in 1850, at seventeen. Three years later he moved to Ohio to edit small-town newspapers. In 1861, when the Civil War commenced, he was editor of *The Bucyrus Journal*, a Republican Party supported and supporting weekly paper. At the end of that year he bought the *Hancock Jeffersonian*, another Republican weekly printed in Findlay, Ohio, and installed himself as editor. (By the way, I grew up in Findlay, where my parents taught in the local college, before we moved to Indianapolis.)

Locke was a thorough partisan, a hardcore Republican, who infused his newspaper with proper party doctrines to educate and lead voters to support party positions and candidates. As the Republican Party was created to oppose the spread of chattel slavery in the United States, he was strongly anti-slavery. He supported the war effort to defeat the rebellion and force the southern slave states back into the national union. He chastised people in Findlay and elsewhere who were soft on the war effort or sympathized with the Confederate rebels. Thus, he despised the position of the Democratic Party for its wishy-washiness on slavery and putting down the rebellion.

From that partisanship Locke composed his first Petroleum Nasby letter in April 1862. The letter grew out of local politics in reaction to a local Democrat who spouted off about the influx of African Americans into the county. Locke wrote and published a supposed letter by a supposed Findlay Democrat named Petroleum V. Nasby offering a petition to drive black people out of Findlay and seize their property. Nasby called for Democrats to divide the spoils among the county central committee and, while they were at it, pay Nasby's personal expenses. The article named real people in the town. Composed with coarse, vulgar language typical of the racist screeds then common in Democratic vocabulary, poorly spelled, and thoroughly mean-spirited, Locke used blunt sarcasm to portray local Democrats as exemplified by a wholly racist, mean, vulgar, venal, and ignorant character.

Locke continued to write supposed letters by his supposed Nasby, first on local politics, but later broadening his scope to attack Democrats across the North as they resisted the efforts of the Lincoln administration to suppress the rebellion. Nasby would spout off about the war and the woes that it brought on himself, revealing a wholly selfish, racist, ignorant, and cowardly character as a stand-in for all antiwar Democrats. The letters were republished in Republican newspapers throughout the North and enjoyed a large readership. Indeed, we know President Lincoln enjoyed Nasby letters as well as Artemus Ward letters. By 1863 Nasby changed his base to the fictional Ohio town of Wingert's Corners. Two years later, when the rebellion was quelled, Nasby fled to "Confedrit X Roads," another fictional village in Kentucky, to be nearer his ideological friends in mourning.

Locke continued the Petroleum Nasby letters into the postwar Reconstruction period, a time when politics refocused on how to integrate the rebel states back into the national union and how to protect the rights of formerly enslaved men and women. When Lincoln's successor Andrew Johnson broke with the Republican Party to pardon ex rebels and resisted granting citizenship to the formerly enslaved, Locke targeted Johnson in his Nasby creations. Nasby became a staunch supporter of President Johnson when Nasby received the postmastership of Confedrit X Roads. Locke continued to

skewer Democrats and Democratic policy with Nasby letters to the end of life in 1888. The letters were read widely, including by Republican Presidents U.S. Grant and Rutherford B. Hayes.

Locke was a satirist, not a true humorist. He created Petroleum Nasby as the exemplar of the opposite of his own beliefs. Nasby was racist, sexist, venal, dishonest, and slippery as a wet noodle. Every idea, every proposal, every wish that Nasby pronounced was to be shunned, spurned, rejected, despised, dismissed. During the war Locke used Nasby to undermine northern Democratic arguments for peace and compromise with the rebels. During the years of Reconstruction, as scholar Kirk McManus has written, the Nasby character “was an ingenious way to strip every Southern argument to its racist core, no matter how it might be disguised in economic or political righteousness.” [McManus, 687]

In 1867, James Clark Redpath recruited David Locke to take Petroleum Nasby on the lecture circuit. By this time, Locke had purchased the *Toledo Blade*, a daily newspaper, and printed his weekly Nasby letter in its weekly edition which enjoyed a national readership. Locke was already a rich man with a wide variety of literary and business interests. He didn't need the bother of touring around the country. But he clearly wished to use his Nasby character to continue to hammer at Democratic rationales for opposing Reconstruction and rights for freed men and women. Redpath made him the highest-paid lecturer on the circuit, receiving \$200 per lecture. Locke started out with a lecture on Reconstruction politics called “Cussid be Canaan.” It was an argument for black equality that started out in the voice of racist Petroleum Vesuvius Nasby, the Confederate apologist. Locke's method was to start out in the voice of Nasby and to enunciate what Nasby would believe. Then, halfway through, without any sort of transition, he switched to his counter argument, his own position, though still in Nasby's voice and manner. Thus, Locke aimed to destroy Nasby's arguments with his own.

Locke also wrote and performed a lecture on women's rights and equality titled, “The Struggle of a Conservative with the Woman Question.” Again, it started out with Nasby stating the Democratic

view opposing women's rights. However, at midpoint, he switched and made his own argument for women's suffrage. In his third lecture, "In Search of the Man of Sin," Locke gave Nasby's and then his own views on human depravity. He used the lecture to strike at financial corruption by Democratic politicians and some of the robber barons at a time when U.S. Grant's Republican administration was riddled with massive thievery and fraud.

Locke's style on the lecture platform was anything but artful. As literary scholar James C. Austin notes, he had "little natural ability as a speaker" and did not try to learn. His friend Mark Twain described his manner. Locke would stride out onto stage and start his lecture immediately. He ignored the audience. With his text in front of him, he leaned his left arm on the lectern, put his right arm behind his back, and read. He did not pause for laughter. To turn a page, his right arm would "swing forward"

and turn it. Thus he continued unaltered for the ninety minutes of the reading. As Twain wrote: “He was a great, burly figure, uncouthly and provincially clothed, and he looked like a simple old farmer.” Twain recalled that thus he “roar[ed] to the end, tearing his ruthless way through the continuous applause and laughter, and taking no sort of account of it. His lecture was a volleying and sustained discharge of bull’s-eye hits, with the slave power and its Northern apologists for target, and his success was due to his matter, not his manner; for his delivery was destitute of art, unless a tremendous and inspiring earnestness and energy may be called by that name. The moment he had finished his piece he turned his back and marched off the stage with the seeming of being not personally concerned with the applause that was booming behind him.”

The three platform lecturers I have introduced to you briefly—Artemus Ward, Josh Billings, and Petroleum Nasby—were profoundly influential for other humorists and comedic performers of that era and for generations to come. The most notable acolyte was Samuel Langhorne Clemens. It was December 1863, and Clemens was working as a newspaper reporter in Virginia City, a wide-open mining town in Nevada Territory, where Clemens signed his articles “Mark Twain.” There he met Charles Farrar Browne, then returning east overland by stagecoach and lecturing en route after touring California as Artemus Ward. Clemens had read Artemus Ward’s newspaper letters but had never seen Browne perform. According to Browne biographer John J. Pullen, the lecture was revelatory for Mark Twain. The two natural wits hit it off immediately, and for the few days that Browne was in town they painted it red with tipsy pranks and play. The experience was life-changing for Twain, who wrote about Ward repeatedly for the rest of his life. He clearly had studied Ward’s manner and technique during the week spent in Virginia City and remembered it thereafter. Twain started giving humorous lectures in 1866 in California following closely Ward’s style. In 1871, after Twain gained national acclaim with his book *Innocents Abroad* and after Ward’s death, he toured the lecture circuit giving a lecture on Artemus

Ward. Ward's success, he noted, depended on his manner and not what he talked about. His way of pausing and hesitating, of moving from humor to seriousness effortlessly, was the key to his humor.

Twain returned to Ward's brilliance and influence in an essay titled, "How to Tell a Story," which he published many years later. The humorous story, he wrote, was an American invention and different from England's comic story and France's witty story. The humorous story depended on the manner of its telling, not its matter. The humorous story must be told gravely, and the teller should drop the finishing "nub" or "snapper" casually, requiring the listener to be alert. "Artemus Ward," he wrote, "used that trick a good deal; then when the belated audience presently caught the joke [Ward] would look up with innocent surprise, as if wondering what they had found to laugh at." Twain again recalled that Ward employed the pause to great effect, as well as dropping a "studied remark apparently without knowing it, as if one were thinking aloud." He gave an example of Ward's art:

He would begin to tell with great animation something which he seemed to think was wonderful; then lose confidence, and after an apparently absentminded pause add an incongruous remark in a soliloquizing way; and that was the remark intended to explode the mine—and it did.

For instance, he would say eagerly, excitedly, "I once knew a man in New Zealand who hadn't a tooth in his head"—here his animation would die out; a silent, reflective pause would follow, then he would say dreamily, and as if to himself, "and yet that man could beat a drum better than any man I ever saw."

Mark Twain's debt to Artemus Ward was great. In the 1880s and 90s, when Twain ran up massive financial debts, he hit the lecture circuit to help restore his bank balance. But Twain did not command top dollar for his lectures like Josh Billings and Petroleum Nasby. Indeed, a lecture-circuit comedic duo of Bill Nye and James Whitcomb Riley overshadowed him. Edgar Wilson Nye, nicknamed

Bill Nye, was a Maine-born, Wisconsin-raised, Wyoming newspaper editor and justice of the peace whose humorous writings appeared in newspapers from coast to coast in the 1880s. In 1886 he teamed up for the first time with his friend James Whitcomb Riley, the Hoosier Poet, on the lecture circuit. They traveled the circuit together from 1888 to 1890, when Riley had to quit due to his alcoholism. They took turns on the stage: Nye presented skits about farming, science, the boy who made money taking whippings at school, or gave an impersonation of a high-school girl giving her graduation essay. He performed completely straight-faced at all times. Riley recited some of his humorous or pathetic poems, pulling the audience from laughter to tears. They clicked on stage because both were brilliant improvisational ad-libbers. Their platform banter delighted audiences. In that they owed much to both Artemus Ward for his improvisational skills and Josh Billings for his delivery of one-liner aphorisms.

I have briefly surveyed the development of stand-up humor. It emerged during the American Civil War, when people needed a good laugh. Charles Browne as Artemus Ward is credited generally with establishing platform humor as a form. He burlesqued the lecturer of his day who aimed to impart moral instruction to young and old. He was succeeded by many circuit-traveling humorists. It is perhaps the one fault of platform humor in the nineteenth century that it successfully hijacked the lyceum circuit and drove from the stage the high-minded lecturer with pretensions to educate the masses. It was the triumph of commercialization over moral uplift, or, as scholar Angela Ray says, of celebrity entertainment over mutual education. Ah, well, we can't have everything.

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