

## Artemus Ward

An itinerant newspaper printer born in Maine, Charles Farrar Browne (1834–1867) introduced his “Artemus Ward” alter ego—a Yankee writer who composed humorous dispatches in dialect—in the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* in 1858. By the time he moved to New York during the 1860 campaign year, Artemus Ward had all but eclipsed his creator, becoming one of the country’s most popular satirists, first in *Vanity Fair* and then in wildly popular books. Lincoln adored Ward and his rival contemporary humorists “Orpheus C. Kerr” (a play on “office seeker”) and “Petroleum V. Nasby,” and like many Americans, found their writings restorative during the most anxious days of the Civil War. His relentlessly humorless Secretary of the Treasury, Salmon P. Chase, remembered that Lincoln opened the historic Cabinet meeting of September 22, 1862, at which the President announced his decision to issue the Emancipation Proclamation, by reading a chapter from Artemus Ward’s new book, “which he thought very funny. Read it, and seemed to enjoy it very much.” Only then did the President assume a “graver tone” and announce his momentous plans to his Cabinet officers. Lincoln undoubtedly also read this pre-inaugural depiction of a backwoods President-elect besieged by job-seekers.

### Artemus Ward On His Visit to Abe Lincoln

I hiv no politics. 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 Betsey Jane smellin of coal ile and gin, in the mornin. I should go to the Poles arly. I should stay there all day. I should see to it that my nabers was thar. I should git carriges to take the kripples, the infirm and the indignant thar. I should be on guard agin frauds and sich. I should be on the look out for the infamouse lise of the enemy, got up jes be4 elecshun for perlitical effeck. When all was over and my candydate was elected, I should move heving & arth—so to speak—until I got orifice, which if I didn’t git a orifice I should turn round & abooze the Administration

with all my mite and maine. But I'm not in the bisniss. I'm in a far more respectful bisniss nor whot pollertics is. I wouldn't give two cents to be a Congresser. The wuss insult I ever received was when sertin citizens of Baldinsville axed me to run fur the Legislater. Sez I, "My frends, dostest think I'd stoop to that there?" They turned as white as a sheet. I spoke in my most orfullest tones, & they knowd *I* wasn't to be trifled with. They slunked out of site to onct.

There<sup>4</sup>, hevin no politics, I made bold to visit Old ABE at his humstid in Springfield. I found the old feller in his parler, surrounded by a perfeck swarm of orifice seekers. Knowin he had been captng of a flat boat on the roarin Mississippi I thought I'd address him in sailor lingo, so sez I "Old ABE, ahoy! Let out yer main-suls, reef hum the forecastle & throw yer jib-poop overboard! Shiver my timbers, my harty!" [N. B. This is guinine mariner langwidge. I know, becawz I've seen sailor plays acted out by them New York theater fellers.] Old ABE lookt up quite cross & sez, "Send in yer petition by & by. I cant possibly look at it now. Indeed. I can't. It's onpossible, sir!"

"Mr. LINKIN, who do you spect I air?" sed I.

"A orifice-seeker, to be sure?" sed he.

"Wall, sir," sed I, "you's never more mistaken in your life. You hain't gut a orifiss I'd take under no circumstances. I'm A. WARD. Wax figgers is my perfeshun. I'm the father of Twins, and they look like me—*both of them*. I cum to pay a frendly visit to the President elect of the United States. If so be you wants to see me say so—if not, say so, & I'm orf like a jug handle."

"Mr. WARD, sit down. I am glad to see you, Sir."

"Repose in ABRAHAM'S Buzzum!" sed one of the orifice seekers, his idee bein to git orf a goak at my expence.

"Wall," sez I, "ef all you fellers repose in that there Buzzum thare'll be mity poor nussin for sum of you!" whereupon Old ABE buttoned his weskit clear up and blusht like a maiding of sweet 16. Jest at this pint of the conversation another swarm of orifice seekers arrove & cum pilin into the parler. Sum wanted post orifices, sum wanted collectorships, sum wanted furrin missions, and all wanted sumthin. I thought Old ABE would go crazy. He hadn't more than had time to shake hands with 'em,

before another tremenjis crowd cum porein onto his premises. His house and dooryard was now perfectly overflowed with orifice seekers, all clameruss for a immejit interview with Old ABE. One man from Ohio, who had about seven inches of corn whiskey into him, mistook me fur Old ABE and addresst me as "The Pra-hayrie Flower of the West!" Thinks I *you* want a offis putty bad. Another man with a goldheded cane and a red nose told Old ABE he was "a seckind WASHINGTON & the Pride of the Boundliss West!"

Sez I, "Square, you wouldn't take a small post-offis if you could git it, would you?"

Sez he, "a patrit is abuv them things, sir!"

"There's a putty big crop of patrits this season, aint there Square?" sez I, when *another* crowd of offis seekers pored in. The house, door-yard, barn & woodshed was now all full, and when *another* crowd cum I told 'em not to go away for want of room as the hog-pen was still empty. One patrit from a small town in Mishygan went up on top the house, got into the chimney and slid down into the parler where Old ABE was endeverin to keep the hungry pack of offiss-seekers from chawin him up alive without benefit of clergy. The minit he reached the fire place he jumt up, brusht the soot out of his eyes, and yelled: "Don't make eny pintment at the Spunkville postoffice till you've read my papers. All the respectful men in our town is signers to that there dockyment!"

"Good God!" cride Old ABE, "they cum upon me from the skize—down the chimneys, and from the bowels of the yearth!" He hadn't more'n got them words out of his delikit mouth before two fat offiss-seekers from Wisconsin, in endeverin to crawl atween his legs for the purpuss of applyin for the tollgate-ship at Milwawky, upsot the President elect & he would hev gone sprawlin into the fire-place if I hadn't caught him in these arms. But I hadn't more'n stood him up strate, before another man cum crashin down the chimney, his head strikin me vilently agin the inards and prostratin my voluptuous form onto the floor. "Mr. LINKIN," shoutid the infatooated being, "my papers is signed by every clergyman in our town, and likewise the skoolmaster!"

Sez I, "you egrejis ass," gittin up & brushin the dust from my eyes, "I'll sign your papers with this bunch of bones, if you don't be a little more keerful how you make my bread basket a depot in the futer. How do you like that air perfumery?" sez I, shuving my fist under his nose. "Them's the kind of papers I'll giv you! Them's the papers *you* want?"

"But I workt hard for the ticket; I toiled night and day! The patrit should be rewarded!"

"Virtoo," sed I, holdin' the infatooated man by the coat-collar, "virtoo, sir, is its own reward. Look at me!" He did look at me, and qualed be4 my gase. "The fact is," I continued, lookin' round upon the hungry crowd, "there is scacely a offiss for every ile lamp carrid round durin' this campane. I wish thare was. I wish thare was furrin missions to be filled on varis lonely Islands where eppydemics rage incessantly, and if I was in Old ABE's place I'd send every mother's son of you to them. What air you here for?" I continnered, warmin up considerable, "can't you giv ABE a minit's peace? Don't you see he's worrid most to death! Go home, you miserable men, go home & till the sile! Go to peddlin tinware—go to choppin wood—go to bilin' sope—stuff sassengers—black boots—git a clerkship on sum respectable manure cart—go round as original Swiss Bell Ringers—becum 'origenal and only' CAMPBELL Minstrels—go to lecturin at 50 dollars a nite—imbark in the peanut bizniss—*write for the Ledger*—saw off your legs and go round givin concerts, with techin appeals to a charitable public, printed on your handbills—anything for a honest livin', but don't come round here drivin old ABE crazy by your outrajus cuttings up! Go home. Stand not upon the order of your goin', but go to onct! If in five minits from this time," sez I, pullin' out my new sixteen dollar huntin cased watch, and brandishin' it before their eyes, "Ef in five minits from this time a single sole of you remains on these here premises, I'll go out to my cage near by, and let my Boy Constructor loose! & if he gits amung you, you'll think Old Solferino has cum again and no mistake!" You ought to hev seen them scamper, Mr. FAIR. They run orf as tho Satun hisself was arter them with a red hot ten pronged pitchfork. In five minits the premises was clear.

“How kin I ever repay you, Mr. WARD, for your kindness?” sed Old ABE advancin and shakin me warmly by the hand. “How kin I ever repay you, sir?”

“By givin’ the whole country a good, sound administration. By poerin’ ile upon the troubled waters, North and South! By pursoooin’ a patriotic, firm, and just course, and then if any State wants to secede, let ’em Sesesh!”

“How ’bout my Cabnit Ministre, WARD?” sed ABE.

“Fill it up with Showmen, sir! Showmen is devoid of politics. They hain’t got a darn principle! They know how to cater to the public. They know what the public wants, North & South. Showmen, sir, is honest men. Ef you doubt their literary ability, look at their posters, and see small bills! Ef you want a Cabinit as is a Cabinit fill it up with showmen, but don’t call on me. The moral wax figger perfeshun mustn’t be permitted to go down while there’s a drop of blood in these vains! A. LINKIN, I wish you well! Ef POWERS or WALCUTT wus to pick out a model for a beautiful man, I scacely think they’d sculp you; but ef you do the fair thing by your country you’ll make as putty a angel as any of us, or any other man! 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 bizniss—admittance only 15 cents.

*December 8, 1860*