

REMINISCENCES OF BRO. ARTEMAS WARD.

By Brother Robert Morris, L. L. D.

AN extract from one of the amusing papers of "The Genial Showman," which appeared in a late issue of *The Keystone* suggests some reminiscences of our late Brother, which may be of interest to your readers. My first acquaintance with Artemas Ward (Charles F. Browne) was formed at Cleveland, Ohio, in the summer of 1860, at a session of the National School of Masonic Instruction, over which I presided. The labors were diversified by social reunions in the dwelling of Bro. Peter Thatcher, and other residents of that beautiful city.

Artemas Ward was, at the time named, the local reporter of one of the Cleveland papers. He sought an introduction to me, upon my first arrival, and offered us all the facilities of the press and telegraph, to publish, from day to day, our proceedings. Not being, at the time, a Freemason, he was not at liberty to attend our meetings in person, but made up from the Secretary's notes a daily resume of all that was of public interest. The social character of our *symposia*, to which he was freely invited, and the high standing of many of the Masonic delegates to whom he was introduced, gave his mind the favorable bias to Freemasonry, that resulted, some years later, in his admission.

I was struck with his modesty. Unlike many professional wits, there was no apparent strain for effect in his manner. He seldom spoke when addressed, appeared to enjoy the conversation of others, was quick at repartee though not particularly brilliant, and had that unmistakable air of "geniality" which gave him, in after years, the title of "The Genial Showman." Good nature was a pleasing ingredient in the soul of Artemas Ward, and I do not remember, in all my acquaintance with him, a single display of harshness in word or pen.

I next met him in New York, July, 1861, in the office of *Vanity Fair* a comic journal, just then expiring for want of support. Its publishers had tempted the poor "Showman" by splendid offers, to leave his quiet work in Cleveland, and take up his abode among the wits of Manhattan. He was fearfully out of place there. Indeed, he was out of everything, of money, of clean linen, of hope. He told me that "where his landlady and washerwoman were to get their shekels was more than all Masonic mysteries!" He had made up his mind to apply for admission to a Masonic Lodge, "if ever fortune should smile," and rather thought he would go back to Cleveland.

In the fall of 1863, I found him on the flood tide of popularity. An Englishman, named Hingson, had "shown him how to do it," had put him in pocket, linen and heart, had travelled with him and for him, and he had returned to New York, where he was filling an uptown hall night after night, with "roaring crowds," and his pockets and Hingson's with the much-needed "shekels." I went to see him, and on my return to my room pondered over the mutability of earthly things. He had now become a member of one of the New York city Lodges.

In the spring of 1865, a party of us gave him a Masonic supper in Indianapolis, Indiana, at the close of one of his exhibitions there. Here he was in his glory. He told us the story of his life "brief but checkered," and left impressions upon the minds of the round dozen who *feted* him on that occasion, which can never be effaced.

In 1866, I met him in Chicago, and at the close of his exhibition went behind the curtain, and enjoyed a private half-hour of his conversation while he was dressing. He related with irresistible humor a scene which had occurred at a Masonic compliment bestowed upon him at Springfield, Illinois, a few nights before, in which he had proven "fidelity to friendship," as but few men would under the circumstances. He was wild with excitement over his contemplated tour of Great Britain; had been made a member of the editorial staff of *London Punch*, an honor never before accorded to an American; had hired Egyptian Hall in London; had "chiliads of promises of patronage" from the best people of that country, &c., &c. I warned him of the abominable winter climate of England, and deprecated its effects upon his weak lungs and debilitated frame; but this he took with a retort of pleasantry, and so we parted. He went to England, opened in Egyptian Hall, performed to crowded houses, caught the usual British "cold on the lungs," continued to perform; caught more cold; drank brandy to overcome it; began to spit blood; gave up his engagements in which he was clearing five hundred dollars a night; ran down into the country; caught more cold, and there, far away from home and friends, making faces to the last against fate and bad fortune, joking about his "effects and legacies," coughing and uncomplaining, the lamp of "the Genial Showman" went out. The wax-works exhibitor of "Baldwinsville, Indiana," poor Artemas Ward, father of a generation of wits, but none equal to the father collapsed. Alas for poor Charley Brown!—*Keystone*.