# M. QUAD COVERS THE LEGISLATURE: THE EARLY HUMOR OF CHARLES BERTRAND LEWIS

Thesis for the Degree of M. A. MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY JACK BENNY GLADDEN 1972



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## **ABSTRACT**

# M. QUAD COVERS THE LEGISLATURE: THE EARLY HUMOR OF CHARLES BERTRAND LEWIS

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## Jack Benny Gladden

This is a study of the manner in which Charles Bertrand Lewis, an internationally known newspaper humorist in the nineteenth century, went about the usually routine business of being a Michigan legislative correspondent at Lansing for the Detroit Free Press in 1869 and 1871. was the period before Lewis, whose pen name was M. Quad, had begun writing humor for the Free Press on a full time basis; but his legislative stories were filled with the type of sketches that would later make him famous. Virtually no scholarly studies of Lewis or his works have been published. This study includes one biographical chapter and six chapters dealing with various topics covered by Lewis in his legislative stories. The study is based largely on the files of the Detroit Free Press for 1869 and 1871, biographical material in magazines and books (there are no full length biographies of Lewis), literary histories, official government documents, and other sources contemporary with Lewis.

Accepted by the faculty of the School of Journalism,
College of Communications Arts, Michigan State University,
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master
of Arts degree.

Director of Thesis

# M. QUAD COVERS THE LEGISLATURE: THE EARLY HUMOR OF CHARLES BERTRAND LEWIS

Ву

Jack Benny Gladden

# A THESIS

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

School of Journalism

1972

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#### PREFACE

In the second half of the nineteenth century in America, the business of writing humor became so widespread that virtually every newspaper of any size and circulation had its own staff humorist. "Wit, and humor, and fun are spontaneous productions in the United States, and effervesce and bubble up like the oil-wells of Pennsylvania," a journalism historian wrote in 1873. The humorists, he said, did not publish in specialized comic journals so much as did their European counterparts, but in regular weekly and daily newspapers. "Each newspaper has one or more humorists," he wrote. "Some of the leading editorial articles sparkle with wit as a duchess does with diamonds." 1

Mark Twain belonged to this group of literary comedians. So did hundreds of others of regional fame, several of whom, in their time, gained national reputations for themselves and their rather obscure publications. Among the better known of this group were James M. Bailey of the <a href="Danbury">Danbury</a> (Connecticut) News, Bob Burdette of the <a href="Burlington">Burlington</a> (Iowa) <a href="Hawkeye">Hawkeye</a>, George W. Peck of <a href="Peck's Sun">Peck's Sun</a> (Milwaukee),

<sup>1</sup> Frederic Hudson, Journalism in the United States, From 1690 to 1872 (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1873), p. 689.

David Ross Locke (Petroleum V. Nasby) of the <u>Toledo Blade</u>, and Charles Bertrand Lewis (M. Quad) of the <u>Detroit Free</u>
Press.

It is the last-named of this group who is the subject of this study. M. Quad was on the staff of the <u>Free Press</u> for twenty-two years in the latter part of the nine-teenth century. Although he was one of the most popular of the humorists of the day, achieving international recognition for his work, he is today a forgotten man. Virtually no scholarly study has been published that specifically concerns Lewis or his work. His personal papers, if he left any, have not been found.

Because of the lack of available research material about the man himself, this study is limited largely to his work. The first chapter, however, is biographical because nowhere else has the information here included been assembled. The remaining chapters deal with Lewis's first major assignment at the <a href="#">Free Press</a>, the coverage of the Michigan legislature in 1869 and again in 1871. His method of approaching legislative news was, as this study attempts to point out, unique. A bibliography of Lewis's major works has been compiled, although no claim is made that the list is complete. No attempt was made, for instance, to locate and include in the bibliography his writings in magazines; inclusion of the newspaper writings was, for obvious reasons,

impossible. Yet it was the newspaper writings on which his reputation was based. A few samples of some of his newspaper sketches have been appended to the study for the benefit of those readers who are interested in longer examples than could be included in the text itself.

I am indebted to George A. Hough, III, and W. Cameron Meyers, associate professors in the School of Journalism at Michigan State University, for their assistance in the study. Professor Hough introduced me to M. Quad and assisted and encouraged me in planning the thesis; Professor Meyers was a meticulous reader, an incisive critic, and a lamplighter in the occasional academic darkness.

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#### CHAPTER I

## M. QUAD

In 1881 the <u>Detroit Free Press</u> began publishing a weekly edition in London, England. It was the first American newspaper to publish in Europe. One of the contributors to that paper, and one of the men whose popularity was largely responsible for the existence of the London edition, was M. Quad, the staff humorist. 1

In 1891 M. Quad, whose real name was Charles Bertrand Lewis, left the <u>Free Press</u> to go to work for the <u>New York</u>

<u>World</u>. The World ran a series of promotional announcements in the upper right-hand "ear" (or corner) of page one telling its readers about the coming attraction. On Sunday, May 3, 1891, Lewis's first contributions to the <u>World</u> occupied an entire inside page of the newspaper. The popularity of the humorist was so great that he reportedly joined the <u>World</u>

<sup>&</sup>quot;The Story of the Detroit Free Press," unsigned, undated pamphlet in the possession of George A. Hough, III, associate professor, School of Journalism, Michigan State University, East Lansing. See also Winston M. Harper, "The Story of the Detroit Free Press." Unpublished M.A. thesis, Wayne State University, 1942, pp. 99-101, and Edmund Kirke, "The City of the Strait," Harper's New Monthly Magazine, August, 1886, p. 347.

at a salary of about \$10,000 a year--a phenomenal amount for the time. 2

In 1897 a literary historian wrote that M. Quad ranked among the top eleven humorists in the United States.  $^{3}$ 

In 1924 when Lewis died in his Brooklyn home at the age of eighty-two, his obiturary in the <u>World</u> consisted of five paragraphs on page nineteen. The story of his death did not appear until the day following the funeral.<sup>4</sup>

Why Lewis's popularity and fame declined so greatly before his death is as much of a mystery as is the rest of his life. For a man who made his living by writing words to be read by millions of people, Lewis himself remained a shadowy figure, even to his contemporaries. If he left any personal papers they have not been found. When he wrote autobiographically he did so behind the mask of M. Quad, so it is usually impossible to separate truth from fiction in these accounts. Even his living daughter, Josie Berry Lewis

As is true with most of the written material concerning Lewis, the accounts of his salary at the World vary. Gilbert Patten said Lewis reportedly received a salary of \$12,000 but that he (Patten) had been told in confidence it was \$8,000. See Frank Merriwell's "Father," edited by Harriet Hinsdale and Tony London (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1964), pp. 154-55. Other accounts place the salary at \$10,000. See The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography (New York: James T. White & Company, 1898), VI, 30.

Robert Ford, American Humourists Recent and Living (Paisley, Scotland: Alexander Gardner, 1897), p. 155. Ford did not specify who the other ten were.

<sup>4&</sup>quot;Charles B. Lewis (M. Quad) Buried," New York World, Aug. 23, 1924, p. 19.

of Hollywood, Florida, remembers little of her father and possesses virtually nothing in the way of his personal papers. The little that is known of his life must be pieced together from official records and a scattering of biographical material in which much conflicting information is presented.

Lewis was born in Liverpool, Ohio, on February 15, 1842. His father, George Lewis, a native of Connecticut, was a carpenter. His mother, Clarissa, was a native of Ohio. He had at least four brothers and three sisters. At some point between 1850 and 1860 the entire family moved from Ohio to Lansing, Michigan. Nothing more is known of Lewis's years in Ohio, and little more is known of his later life in Lansing.

A few anecdotes about his boyhood days in Lansing are related in some county histories, but these are mostly recollections of early residents and their veracity is suspect.

One such account, written in 1883 by a man who was recalling his days as a teacher in Lansing in 1856, indicated that Lewis's funny side showed through early in life.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup>U. S., Department of the Interior, Census Office, Population Schedules of the Seventh Census of the United States: 1850, roll 709, Ohio, Medina County (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Service, National Archives Microfilm Publications, 1964), no. 432; U. S., Department of the Interior, Census Office, Population Schedules of the Eighth Census of the United States: 1860, roll 545, Michigan, VI and VII, Huron and Ingham Counties (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Service, National Archives Microfilm Publications, 1967), no. 653.

"Charley Lewis, the future famous M. Quad, kept the school in a roar with his funny declamations," the writer recalled.

A county historian remembered that in the 1850s Lewis was a student in the school in Lansing. He cited a story told by the older residents of the community to show how Lewis "first was noticed as a humorist."

An agent for a medicine firm had decorated the fences in the city with advertisements, as: "For your ills take my pills," or "For chills take my remedies," etc. Charles procured a different kind of paint and painted under each sign: "Be sure you buy your coffins of Daniel Buck."

This sounds like something Lewis might have done, even as an adult.

Several of the biographical sketches about Lewis, written after he became famous, indicated that he was a graduate of the Michigan Agricultural College, the fore-runner of Michigan State University at East Lansing.

Formally founded in 1855 and opened to students in 1857, the college was the first in the nation established specifically for the scientific study of agriculture and became

George P. Sanford, "Reminiscential," Lansing
Journal, Feb. 22, 1883. Reprinted in Collections of the
Pioneer Society of the State of Michigan Together With
Reports of County Societies (Lansing: Wynkoop Hallenbeck
Crawford Co., 1907), VI, 293.

An Account of Ingham County From Its Organization, edited by Frank N. Turner, Vol. III of <u>Historic Michigan:</u>
Land of the Great Lakes, Its Life, Resources, Industries,
People, Politics, Government, Wars, Institutions, Achievements, the Press, Schools and Churches, Legendary and Prehistoric Lore (n.p., n.d.), p. 115.

the first of the federal land grant colleges under the Morrill Act of 1862. Lewis apparently attended the college for no more than one term. He was listed as a student in the second term of the first school year after the college opened. He would have been fifteen years old at the time. The budding young humorist likely had no taste for an agriculturally oriented college. About ten years later when he began writing legislative news for the <u>Detroit Free Press</u>, he included in his stories several attacks on the college. If he were an alumnus, he felt no sense of loyalty to his alma mater.

Exactly what Lewis did during his years in Lansing is not clear. At some point he learned the printing trade and seems to have worked in a newspaper office in Lansing, probably that of the <u>Democrat</u>. One of the earliest biographical sketches about Lewis said that he came to Lansing when he was only eight years old, attended the Union school, went to the agricultural college for a year, and then went to work in the printing office of the <u>Lansing Democrat</u>. Some of the facts

Madison Kuhn, Michigan State: The First Hundred Years (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1955), pp. 1-52, passim.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup>"First Annual Catalogue of the Michigan State Agricultural College 1857" (unpublished, handwritten catalogue on file in Special Collections Room, Michigan State University Library, East Lansing), p. [12].

<sup>10</sup> Richard H. Titherington, "Charles B. Lewis: 'M. Quad' of the Detroit Free Press," Golden Argosy, Jan. 8, 1887, p. 88.

in the article are inaccurate, but the sequence of events probably is correct.

One curious contradiction in the early records is to be found in the census taker's report for 1860 in which Lewis, who was nineteen at the time, was listed as an apprentice to a chair maker. Nowhere else is this occupation mentioned. It could have been true, the census taker could have made a mistake, or it could have been another one of Lewis's jokes.

Early in June, 1861, shortly after the outbreak of the Civil War, Lewis, still nineteen, began an adventure that in later years would be the basis of a book and would furnish material for many sketches and articles. He enlisted in the army. On June 10 he was enrolled as a private in Company G, Third Regiment, Michigan Infantry, at Grand Rapids. He had enlisted for three years, but in less than two months he was a civilian again. On August 1 the young

<sup>11</sup> U. S., Department of the Interior, Census Office, Population Schedules of the Eighth Census of the United States: 1860, roll 545, Michigan, VI and VII, Huron and Ingham Counties (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Service, National Archives Microfilm Publications, 1967), no. 653.

<sup>12</sup> Lewis's military records are available from the General Services Administration, National Archives and Records Service, Washington, D.C. Citations to these records will hereafter be noted as "Military records," followed by the title of the specific document (if available), the form number (if available) and the date on which the document was completed. See "Company Muster-in Roll," form 356b, June 10, 1861.

private was discharged for disability due to chronic rheumatism. It isn't known if Lewis saw any fighting during this period, or how far he actually got into the battle areas. His records indicate only that the examination and discharge took place at the camp of the third regiment, but the location of the camp was not given. 13

At the time of his enlistment, Lewis listed his occupation as "printer" and his place of residence as Lansing. Apparently he returned to Lansing following his discharge. Whether he continued work as a printer is not known, but he probably did.

In October, just over two months from the time of his release from the army, he acquired a bride. The young printer-veteran was married to Jennie B. Narmore on October 17. They were married in Roxand, Michigan, a small town in Eaton County, by a justice of the peace. The couple apparently returned to Lansing and on September 10, 1863, Mrs. Lewis gave birth to a daughter who was named Katy, or Katie B. 14

Two years later Lewis, recovered from his rheumatism, re-enlisted in the army. On February 17, 1865, he enlisted

<sup>13</sup>Military record. "Certificate of Disability for Discharge," July 31, 1861. See also "Company Muster Roll," form 358, Aug. 1, 1861.

<sup>14</sup> Military record. Dept. of the Interior, Bureau of Pensions, form 3-389, March 30, 1915.

at Jackson, Michigan, as a private in the Sixth Michigan Cavalry, for a period of one year. He was transferred a few months later to the First Michigan Veteran Cavalry and served the duration of his enlistment with that outfit. He was honorably discharged on February 17, 1866, at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Nothing is known of Lewis's personal record as a soldier or of the type of activities he participated in. Following his discharge he again returned to Lansing. On May 17, 1867, another child was born, a son, Arthur B. 16

Lewis's activities during the next two years are difficult to follow. At some point in his early career he seems to have worked as a printer for the <u>Jacksonian</u>, at Pontiac, Michigan. Most of the early biographical sketches mention this paper in connection with one of Lewis's most famous sketches. Specific details of the story vary considerably from article to article, but apparently after his second discharge from the army he was offered a job on the <u>Maysville</u> (Kentucky) <u>Bulletin</u>. Enroute to Maysville, Lewis was traveling on a steamboat through Ohio when the boiler of the boat exploded and he, along with most of the other

<sup>15</sup> Military record. "Volunteer Enlistment," Feb. 17, 1865. See also letter, George E. Downey, comptroller of the Treasury Dept., to the Commission of Pensions, May 27, 1915, GSA Archives and Records Service.

<sup>16</sup> Military record. Dept. of the Interior, Bureau of Pensions, form 3-389, March 30, 1915.

passengers who were not killed, was seriously injured. He was taken to a hospital in Cincinnati where he recovered.

while he was working on the <u>Jacksonian</u>) Lewis wrote an account of the experience. His article, "How it Feels to be Blown Up," was a humorous version of the explosion and of Lewis's "business aloft." It isn't clear where the article was first published, but the editors of the <u>Detroit Free Press</u> reportedly saw it, liked it, picked it up for their own newspaper according to the privileges of the "exchange system," and, according to some of the accounts, offered the author a job. It seems doubtful that the editors of the <u>Free Press</u> sought Lewis out and offered him a job based on one such article. It is possible, however, that when he applied for a job at that newspaper he was remembered because of the article.

Some accounts say that it was this article to which Lewis first affixed the signature "M. Quad." That may or

<sup>17</sup> Before the existence of wire services and press associations, newspapers exchanged by mail copies of their newspapers with other newspapers throughout the country. Each newspaper was free to clip and reprint stories from other newspapers.

<sup>18</sup> Most of the articles about Lewis tell some version of this story. See Titherington, "Charles B. Lewis," p. 88; "Charles B. Lewis (M. Quad), a Sketch," <u>Critical Review</u>, February, 1893, pp. 52-53. The sketch, or at least a version of it, is the first sketch in Lewis's book, <u>Quad's Odds</u> under the title "Up Among the Splinters."

may not be true, but he acquired the pen name before he began working for the <u>Free Press</u>. His own explanation of how he came to choose the name appeared in two slightly different versions. In 1897 he reportedly said that he first used the name in signing the "Blown Up" article. "It was the first thing that popped into my brain," he said.

An em quad, you know, is the metal space a printer puts between the period and the first letter of the following word. I might just as well have signed myself Italics, Roman, Small Caps, or any other printer's term, but M. Quad struck me first and has stuck by me ever since. 19

A few years later he gave a slightly different explanation. "In those days," he said,

when all type was set by hand, we started each paragraph with what we called an em quad to give it an indention. It was the basis of all type measurement in those days, just as it is now. The name had a fascination for me and when I began to write I adopted it as a pen name. . . "20

In any event, whether the choice was made on the spur of the moment or after a period of study, the name was a term that Lewis learned at the printer's case.

Lewis became the legislative correspondent for the <a href="Free Press">Free Press</a> in 1869. His specific status or title is unclear. Because of a series of fires at various times in its early years of publication, the <a href="Free Press">Free Press</a> has no personnel records

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in Author's Readings, compiled by Art Young (2nd ed.: New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1897), p. 195.

<sup>20</sup> Quoted in "M. Quad Comes Back With a Little Piece for 'The Sun,'" New York Sun, Nov. 12, 1916, n.p.

dating back to this period. Some of Lewis's stories from Lansing bore the credit line "From our own correspondent"; others appeared under the line "From our own reporter."

But there seemed to be no particular significance to the distinction between correspondent and reporter. Whether Lewis was a full-time regular employee or a special correspondent employed specifically to cover the legislature is not clear. He listed his place of residence as Lansing in the official legislative manual for 1869 and as Detroit in the manual for 1871. The Detroit City Directory for 1870-71 contains a residence listing for Lewis at 344 Third Street. His occupation in that directory was given as a reporter for the Free Press. 22

Lewis covered the legislature for the <u>Free Press</u> in 1869 and again in 1871. Because of the nature of his stories written during this period, it is almost impossible to pinpoint any specific time at which he began writing humor for the newspaper. Humor was a part of all his writing. But after the close of the 1869 session, he began writing a

<sup>21</sup> Manual for the Use of the Legislature of the State of Michigan. 1869-70, prepared by D. C. Henderson (Lansing: W. S. George & Co., 1869), p. 117. Also Manual for the Use of the Legislature of the State of Michigan. 1871-72, prepared by S. D. Bingham (Lansing: W. S. George & Co., 1871), p. 123.

<sup>22</sup> City Directory of the Inhabitants, Business Firms, Incorporated Companies, Etc., of the City of Detroit for 1870-71 (Detroit: Charles F. Clark & Co., 1870), p. 297.

number of purely humorous articles for the <u>Free Press</u>. The articles dealt with a multiplicity of subjects and took a variety of literary forms.

Late in 1869 two of Lewis's contributions were published as letters to the editor. 23 The other humorous sketches, both before and after these letters, were simply signed articles. These articles, or columns, continued at irregular intervals throughout the rest of 1869. By November the humorous contributions of M. Quad had become more or less regular Sunday features of the newspaper. Occasionally Lewis's pen name was included in the headline, as in the case of the article that appeared on December 5, "What M. Quad Thinks of Operatic Music." 24 Then came the two letters to the editor. On January 16, 1870, Lewis's article was carried under the headline "M. Quad's Epistle." 25 From that point on the "Epistle" became a standing feature of the Sunday edition.

Most of the early biographical sketches about Lewis indicate that he wrote the police news for the <a href="Free Press">Free Press</a> during his early years at the newspaper. No specific records are available to substantiate this assertion, but on

<sup>23</sup> Detroit Free Press, Dec. 15, 1869, p. 3, and Dec. 19, 1869, p. 3.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 4.

January 6, 1870, a story in the <u>Free Press</u> told of a presentation, which had taken place at the central station (the police station), and at which M. Quad made the presentation speech. The ceremony was all a joke, but the story indicated that Lewis was known around the central station.

About a month later, on February 8, the first of what was to become a unique series of articles in the <a href="#">Free</a>
<a href="#">Press</a> appeared at the top of page one. Under a two-deck headline, "Crimes and Criminals/An Hour at the Central Station Court," the story told of the activities at the central station police court. The cases were factual, as evidenced by a separate standing feature on page one, "The Courts," in which the disposition of all cases in each of the city courts was given. But the style in which "An Hour at the Central Station Court" was written was far from standard. The first story began:

Yesterday morning, when the ropes were stretched across the court-room at the Central Station, and the usual crowd of loafers had taken one side, and the justice, reporters, policemen and prisoners the other, there was a little pause, a stillness, and then the trumpet-tone voice of Bijah Joy sang out for THE WICKEDEST MAN,

who was walked out to confront the bland smile ever resting on the countenance of Justice Stoll. He gave his name as William, alias John, alias Henry, alias Billy Powers, and he was giving several other "aliases" when the fore-finger of the law pointed full in his eye as an injunction that he might rest his mouth right there. Saturday night Officer Henkel found him near the Central depot, stripped to the bluff, [sic] and dying to step on some individual among the crowd who had

<sup>26&</sup>quot;A Presentation," <u>ibid.</u>, Jan. 6, 1870, p. 1.

gathered round. He soon got up in the world--up at the Central Station, but he had to be knocked down two or three times on the route to keep his enthusiasm within proper limits. His case was called, and his chances for a "fifty" looked as bright as a roll of red flannel, when a legal shyster gave him the wink, he demanded a jury, and was sent back to wait until this morning. A case is already pending against him in the Recorder's Court, and between the two, he will have to "git or dangle!"

Such treatment of police news was not original with Lewis. The practice had been started years earlier by the London Morning Herald and had been picked up by some newspapers in the United States, notably the New York Sun. 27

But the concept was new to Detroit and the central station court series became so popular that a few years after it was started, a staged burlesque of one of the court sessions, in which the real judge played himself, was produced for the benefit of an orphan asylum. 28 Just how popular the series was outside of Detroit is not clear, but certainly it marked Lewis's real beginnings as a humorist. 29

From this point on Lewis grew in popularity, and as his popularity grew the circulation of the <a href="#">Free Press</a> began to increase correspondingly. Because of the lack of

<sup>27</sup> Frank Luther Mott, American Journalism: A History: 1690-1960 (3rd ed.; New York: Macmillan Co., 1962), p. 223.

<sup>28&</sup>quot;'M. Quad' Made Judge Poke Fun at Own Court," Detroit Free Press, Aug. 24, 1924, sec. 1, p. 14.

Lewis included six of the central station court sketches in Quad's Odds, published in 1875.

biographical information, his career from here on is difficult to follow without making a careful study of the <a href="Free Press">Free Press</a>
itself in the ensuing years—a project considerably beyond the scope of this paper. At some point, not too long after the creation of the central station court series, Lewis began writing about the activities of Brother Gardner and the Lime-Kiln Club. The series was based on weekly reports of the "meetings" of the imaginary self-improvement club. Years later Lewis recalled for a newspaper reporter the origins of Brother Gardner.

"One of the first groups of characters I made up," he was reported to have said,

was Brother Gardner and his negro associates of the Lime-Kiln Club. The character of Brother Gardner was based to a small extent on an old negro who used to frequent the market in Detroit with a dog and a white-wash pail, looking for a job. He and two other negroes and the dog were the only real basis of the Lime-Kiln Club. 30

Many of the readers of the sketches believed the club was real and inquired about its location. <sup>31</sup> A biographical sketch about Lewis that appeared in 1887 called the Lime-Kiln Club series the "greatest of all his successes" and said that Brother Gardner had "become a familiar character all over the country." <sup>32</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Quoted in "No Age Limit for Humor," Kansas City Star, March 8, 1924, p. [unknown].

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Titherington, "Charles B. Lewis," p. 88.

In 1872 Lewis published a book, <u>Bugler Ben</u>, <sup>33</sup> which seems to have been his first book-length publication. The book must have been a paperback novel, although publication data on the book are sketchy. Other books followed, including a few dime novels. Most of the books were simply collections of his newspaper writings.

In 1876 Lewis copyrighted a play, "Her Next Husband." During the next twenty-two years he wrote and copyrighted six other plays, 34 although only one, "Yakie," appears to have been produced. "Yakie" was performed in the Detroit Opera House in April, 1879. During his years at the Free Press Lewis contributed to a number of magazines, including Hearth and Home, Fireside and Friend, New York Weekly, Cleveland Pictorial World, and Ballou's Monthly Magazine. 36

<sup>33</sup>W. J. Burke and Will D. Howe, American Authors and Books, 1640 to the Present Day (Revised ed.; New York: Crown Publishers, 1962), p. 431.

<sup>34</sup> Dramatic Compositions Copyrighted in the United States 1870 to 1916 (2 vols.; Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1918), II, 3223-24.

<sup>35&</sup>quot;'Yakie'/The First Night of M. Quad's Dialect Comedy," Detroit Free Press, April 25, 1879, p. 1.

The Carpet-Bag, a humor magazine published in Boston from 1851 to 1853. No less an authority than journalism historian Frank Luther Mott included M. Quad in a list of contributors to the magazine, yet Lewis was only eleven years old when The Carpet-Bag stopped publication. See the bibliography of Lewis's works at the end of this paper for as complete a list of Lewis's writings as the author has been able to assemble.

When Lewis left Detroit in 1891 to go to work for the New York World, he was a rather famous man. The management of the Free Press presented him with a diamond-studded Masonic pin inscribed "THE DETROIT FREE PRESS to Charles B. Lewis, April 24, 1891." The World greeted him with a promotion campaign due a celebrity. Although he continued to write until a few months before his death on August 21, 1924, his popularity seems to have declined steadily after he arrived in New York. This portion of his life is totally outside the context of this study and, although some research has been made into his activities during these years, the results are of such a tenuous nature as to be unsuitable for inclusion in a scholarly work.

Suffice it to say that Lewis's wife apparently died while he was still in Detroit. When he got to New York, Lewis, whose interest in play writing must have lured him to the theater and theater people, met and married an actress, Harriet Louise Mann. Lewis was more than twenty years older than the young actress. He and his new wife had two daughters, one of whom died shortly after birth. The second daughter, Josie Berry, was reared by her mother who was separated from Lewis while Josie was still an infant. 38

<sup>37 &</sup>quot;Presentation to Mr. Charles B. Lewis," <u>Detroit</u> Free Press, April 25, 1891, p. 5.

<sup>38</sup> Letter, Josie Berry Lewis to author, June, 1971.

Few personal anecdotes about Lewis exist. Most of the articles about him concern his writings. According to the physical description he gave of himself when he filled out his military enlistment papers, he was a small man. He was five-feet, five or six inches tall, with grey-blue eyes, auburn hair and a fair complexion. He was called eccentric by some early biographers and he may have been. "If there is an odder man than he in the country," a Detroit resident was supposed to have said, "we would like to have him sent along with the circus." His "den," as Lewis referred to his office in the Free Press building, reportedly was filled with personal mementoes ranging from a piece of rope used in

<sup>39</sup> Letter, A. B. Lewis to U. S. Bureau of Pensions, Aug. 25, 1924, GSA Archives and Records Service.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup>Letter, Josie Berry Lewis to author, June, 1971.

<sup>41</sup> The description varies slightly in difference documents.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup>Quoted in Kirke, "The City of the Strait," p. 346.

a hanging to powder flasks from the Merrimac, the armored Confederate warship. Most accounts said Lewis was quiet, had few close friends, but was generous with those less fortunate than he.

One author, who knew Lewis, said that in his later years in New York one of his delights was to do "literary missionary work among sailors." He would fill a basket with books of fiction, stroll along the wharves of New York harbor and distribute the books to the sailors. Or, according to the same author, Lewis would get on a street car and ride until he got tired, paying no attention at all to where he was going. 43

apparently well liked by his contemporaries. "He is spoken of as odd and eccentric," another writer said after a visit to Detroit, "and that he may be, but I incline to the opinion that this peculiarity is due to the fact that Nature produced him in one of her genial moods, when she would do the world a kindly turn by bestowing upon it a gentle soul, who would do us good by spreading for us a wholesome feast of mingled wit and wisdom." 44

<sup>43</sup> Author's Readings, compiled by Art Young, p. 197.

<sup>44</sup> Kirke, "The City of the Strait," p. 347.

#### CHAPTER II

## POLITICS AND POLITICIANS

When the editors of the <u>Free Press</u> sent their new reporter to cover the 1869 session of the state legislature, they did not expect the session to be of particular importance. "We are not aware of any very important matters of State policy that are to command its attention during the session," the newspaper said in an editorial on January 6, the day the legislature officially convened. "Its entire political power is in the hands of the Radicals, yet it is to be hoped that if any important question shall arise for its consideration that the political majority will so far forget party policy as to consider it as statesmen rather than as partisans."

This feeling that the session would not be particularly significant may have had something to do with the decision to send a new reporter to cover it. On the other hand Lewis, who had lived in Lansing off and on for several years, seems to have had some experience in covering the legislature, possibly for another newspaper. On April 4 in a sort of wrapup story about the 1869 session, Lewis wrote: "Two years ago, in closing up his report of the session,

your correspondent asserted. . . . " Apparently he had covered the session for another newspaper in 1867. Although there are noticeable differences between his stories filed in 1871 and those filed in 1869, the earlier stories, although not as well written as the later ones, are not those of an inexperienced, insecure beginning reporter.

Lewis encountered a few problems during the period he covered the 1869 session, but he seems to have done an adequate if not admirable job, particularly under conditions that must have been trying at best. In the first place the legislature was controlled by the Radical Republicans. Free Press was politically Democratic; the other two Detroit daily newspapers, the Post and the Advertiser & Tribune, were Republican. In a period when newspapers were not just nominally, but actively, partisan, this fact alone was enough to put frustrating stumbling blocks in the path of a Democratic reporter attempting to cover the activities of a Republicancontrolled legislature. In the second place both the Post and the Advertiser & Tribune had two reporters covering the legislature, one each in the House and Senate. Lewis, who had a permanent desk in the House chamber, was responsible for the activities of both bodies. 1

<sup>1</sup> Manual for the Use of the Legislature of the State of Michigan. 1869-70, prepared by D. C. Henderson (Lansing: W. S. George & Co., 1869), pp. 102, 117. See also the legislative manual for 1867-68. In the past the Free Press had used two reporters to cover the legislature, but in both 1869 and 1871 Lewis covered the sessions by himself.

Press followed a rather standard format in presenting legislative news. Once the sessions got under way there were daily stories in the newspaper except during periods of adjournment. In 1869 the Free Press published a newspaper seven days a week, although the Monday paper was the same as the Sunday edition with only minor changes. The legislative stories did not change from Sunday to Monday. In 1871 the Monday edition was no longer being published.

During both years the legislative stories usually ran, or at least started, on page one. The paper consisted of four pages daily and Sunday; in 1871 a one-sheet (two page) supplement was added to the Sunday edition. The pages were not numbered. In both years the first item under the headline was a list (or lists) of the legislative proceedings. Separate lists were given for House and Senate and each list was sub-divided into various categories that were not always consistent from day to day. A typical breakdown of the activities of each house included lists of petitions and bills introduced, reports of committees, other reports, bills passed and any special business of the day such as speeches made, actions taken under suspension of the rules, resolutions passed, and so forth. Such lists gave complete information on the activities of each house for any given day. Following the list of proceedings came the legislative story itself, in which Lewis expounded on the more important actions taken during the sessions. He also included numerous non-legislative items that he found of interest. Although he covered the more significant items in this way, he did not have to rely on the story itself to cover the routine business of state.

In 1869 the entire package ran under a multi-deck headline, the first deck of which always read: "FROM LANSING." The list of proceedings ran immediately under the last deck of the headline. Following the list a smaller headline, usually of several decks, introduced the story. The same general format was used in 1871 except that the first two decks of the main headline were "MICHIGAN/THE LEGISLATURE." The "FROM LANSING" head followed the lists and was published above the story.

Although the telegraph was in operation, the main stories were sent from Lansing to Detroit by mail train. Brief summaries of the more important actions or some portions of the lists of proceedings were filed by telegraph if they occurred after the mail train had departed for Detroit.<sup>2</sup>

An examination of the legislative reportorial coverage in the Free Press prior to 1869 indicates that

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup>In his legislative story in the <u>Free Press</u> of Jan. 10, 1871, Lewis said that during the previous session a train had left Lansing in the afternoon so that the stories about the morning sessions could be sent by train. On Jan. 17 he reported that a similar train would carry the reports for the 1871 legislative sessions.

only occasionally was an actual story used. On a daily basis the newspaper had relied primarily on the list of proceedings to convey the information to its readers. Lewis, outnumbered though he was by competing reporters and Republican politicians, filed daily stories that not only covered the high points of the legislative business but were witty and readable as well.

The first legislative story of the 1869 session appeared in the <u>Free Press</u> on Monday, January 4, on an inside page. The was a routine story, only eight lines long, and it was signed simply "M." Probably this was not Lewis' signature, since all the subsequent legislative stories were signed "M. Quad." During the 1867 session the legislative reports were signed "M." and the reporter at that time was Stephen B. McCracken. Probably McCracken was with Lewis long enough in 1869 to get him started on his new assignment and filed this story himself.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup>All of Lewis's stories quoted throughout this study, unless otherwise noted, appeared in the <u>Free Press</u> between Jan. 1 and April 30, 1869, or Jan. 1 and April 20, 1871. Because of the nature of the study specific references to every story cited would occupy an inordinate amount of space. Therefore no notes have been used for Lewis's own stories that fall within this period. An effort has been made to give the approximate, if not always the specific, date of each story cited in the text itself.

Manual Containing the Rules of the Senate & House of Representatives of the State of Michigan, with the Joint Rules of the Two Houses, and Other Matter (Lansing: John A. Kerr & Co., 1867), p. 156.

In any case the story set the stage for Lewis' first blast of political satire. The target was Zachariah Chandler. the incumbent Republican senator from Michigan, who was up for re-election. 5 "The Senatorship excites but little comment," the story concluded. "The general impression seems to be that the 'Blood Letter' has the inside track."6 days later, on January 6, the Free Press editorial noted that there was some dissension within the Repulbican party over Chandler and it quoted some Radical critics as calling him "a drunkard and a debaucher" and as saying that he made Michigan look like a "laughing stock" all over the nation. The editorial noted sarcastically that such comments were probably true and were all the more reason he should be reelected. "If he was anything else than what he is," the editorial said, "he would not be competent to represent the Radical party." This official stand of the newspaper may have influenced Lewis' own comments in his legislative reports.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup>At this time United States senators were elected by the state legislature rather than by popular vote.

The "Blood Letter" was a reference to Chandler. The nickname, which seems to have been widely known, came from a letter that Chandler had written to Governor Austin Blair in 1861 before the outbreak of the Civil War. In a postscript to the letter, which concerned the growing antagonism between the slave and the free states, Chandler had written: "Some of the manufacturing states think a fight would be awful. Without a little blood-letting, this Union will not, in my estimation, be worth a rush." The letter was discovered and made public in the pages of the Free Press which, under the editorship of Wilbur F. Story, opposed a war. See Charles Moore, History of Michigan (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Co., 1915), 1, 414-15.

The current governor, Henry P. Baldwin, and Chandler had joined forces the previous summer and there appeared little chance Chandler would lose the election, the only potential opposition coming from outgoing Governor Henry Crapo. The last item in Lewis' first signed legislative story, which also ran on January 6, concerned the senatorial election.

The Lieutenant Governor's presence here has created not a little uneasiness in the minds of Mr. Chandler's supporters; and the friends of "Our Blair" cannot see why ex-Governor Crapo should want to go to Congress. Two or three days will be apt to settle the matter, but the indications are that the present [sic] incumbent will have cause to offer his tottering kingdom for a jaded squire, if by that means he can ride triumphant from the fray. "We shall see what we shall see."

Lewis let his prose turn a little purple. It would grow more so as the session wore on.

The Chandler question was settled the next day when the senator was nominated on the first ballot of the Republican caucus. Since the Republicans controlled both houses of the legislature by large majorities, the election itself on January 19 was a mere formality. Lewis flavored his account of Chandler's speech to the Republican caucus with a dash of sarcasm.

When the committee appeared escorting in the great Zachariah, members rose, clapped their hands, and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup>Editorial, Detroit Free Press, Jan. 8, 1869, p. 2.

Former Governor Austin Blair, at this time a United States Representative from Michigan.

exhibited much enthusiasm. . . . After an introduction by the chairman, he [Chandler] launched out into a speech that lasted about an hour and a half. He proposed to render an account of his stewardship; and going back twelve years, he narrated everything done by Chandler. . . .

Lewis then listed many of the items recounted by Chandler in his speech. "His <u>finis</u> was greeted with great applause,"

Lewis noted, "and amidst the congratulations and handshakes of his friends, Mr. Chandler and the caucus broke up."

Lewis devoted a few more paragraphs to Chandler during the next few months, but he seems to have summed up his feelings by his account of the actual election on January 19. After reporting Chandler's victory, Lewis added: "This begins the third term of our staunch old <u>rum un</u> Senator." The italicized pun was a standard form of humor of the day.

Although Chandler was the object of a few gibes from Lewis and the <u>Free Press</u>, Lewis rarely singled out individuals for criticism. Most of his barbs and satire were aimed at politicians and lobbyists in general, or at the political system itself. Always a supporter of the "little man,"

Lewis tried to keep a close watch on the taxpayers' money.

In his first legislative story of the 1869 session,

Lewis reported that a building had been remodeled into

a billiard hall for the use of the legislators. "'Come easy
go easy' has always characterized the financial conduct of
those who make our laws, or lobby others into making them,"

he wrote, "and such an establishment as the above has been proved by time to be a matter of necessity."

Early in 1871 Lewis reiterated his belief that legislators were careless in their use of the public's money.

In casting up certain figures, the other day, I placed the current expenses of the Legislature at ten thousand dollars. I expected that some would say that I had placed the sum total too high, and therefore, put everything down to the lowest notch. The real expenses of this body are as near five hundred dollars per day as the Speaker can figure it, and this, I believe, does not include the cost of any of the printing. The daily sessions are not over four hours in length, and, therefore, we can set the expenses down at one hundred and twenty-five dollars per hour, which is over two dollars per minute. So, if this gentleman speaks ten minutes, and that one fifteen, and so on, more or less, their words cost the Senate about two cents each, and should be carefully considered. The clerk's call of the yeas and nays costs five dollars, and a member disposed to be a little dyspeptic over a measure can rise in his seat and talk twenty dollars' worth without seeming to use up any time at all.

The humor was low key and the "facts" no doubt exaggerated, but he made his point.

A few weeks later Lewis reported that he had learned of a House member who was not going to draw the five dollars allowed each member for stationery. He said the man didn't believe in adding to the burden of the taxpayers. Lewis said he had asked to see the man and had "sent a boy downtown to make arrangements for a hundred thousand photographs." But the clerk of the House would not tell him the man's name.

"I am, however, bound to find out who the man is," he vowed,
"and shall then use his action as the foundation for a poem which I am going to bring out in the spring."

Not all the misusers of public funds were legislators. Later in the 1871 session the legislature approved the construction of a new capitol. The announcement of the plans brought job-seekers and speculators to Lansing. A few weeks after the passage of the bill, Lewis said that everyone who had hoped to gain monetarily by the building of the capitol had come to Lansing. He added, in mild disgust:

Blessed be the man who wants nothing at the hands of a legislative body! He can get up with the sun, free from headaches, and go to bed at night without having to reproach himself that he has told several scores of lies since breakfast. He can keep a full, free eye, need not make himself a dog, and the ague passes him by on the other side.

Early in each legislative session the lawmakers set about the task of organizing themselves into a functioning body. In the process minor offices and jobs were sought after and filled according to the spoils system. If Lewis was mildly disgusted with the "seekers of that lacteal nourishment, usually dubbed as official 'pap'", he made use of them as "items" for his stories. "There is no office here in the gift of the Legislature that has not had from two to twenty applicants," he wrote early in the 1869 session.

Even your humble and retiring correspondent, whose countenance has not a particle of legislative look about it, has had to stand a score of self introductions from hungry candidates, promise the position of fireman to at least a dozen, and guarantee a messengership to boys innumerable. When asked to secure the influence of my "brother members," I always promise, though I regret it when I see the applicant walk off with a countenance denoting a surety of the sought for position.

Lewis frequently got into his own stories, often in the role of a practical joker. Again in 1871 he was approached by job hunters. He said he signed all the petitions handed to him and spoke a good word for all who asked. The <a href="#">Free Press</a> ran a table showing the number of petitions he had signed, the number he had promised to sign, etc. The "applicants appointed owing to my influence," Lewis wrote, totaled "000."

He wasn't particularly hard on the job seekers though. Jobs were not particularly plentiful in the postwar years and Lewis, who frequently sided with the "little man" or the "underdog," saved his best (or his worst) barbs and satire for the politicians and the political process. He generally viewed politicians as a "do-nothing" lot, who were taking care of themselves at public expense.

In 1871 Lewis' humor tended to be more thoughtful, particularly when it was directed at politicians, than it had been in 1869. There was a touch of flippancy without much point in the earlier stories. On January 22, 1869, Lewis reported:

In the Senate, the lawyers are too many for the farmers, being nine to six; the merchants number five, and there is one doctor, one clergyman and one editor; six are unmarried. Here, as in the House, a great many follow the occupation or profession of "Miscellaneous"—which is generally understood to mean running for office.

In 1871 he expressed similar sentiments, but in a slightly different way. The writing was better than it had been in

1869, the satire a bit more pointed and the target was enlarged to include politicians in general. Lewis was talking about the 1871 election of a United States senator from Michigan:

The fight was hot and bitter all day yesterday, and will be re-newed with ardor to-day, until the choice of the caucus this evening sends three of the candidates to that political bourne from whence no--. I was going to say that no political traveler ever returned; but they do, rising up again at the faintest smell of office, and perfectly willing to endure it all over again, if there be the least hope that an effort may be crowned with success.

Lewis was convinced that politicians were hopeless windbags. Reporting on an excursion that the 1869 legislators made through the Saginaw Valley, he said that the reporters had much to do on the trip. But if they had participated in previous excursions, he said, they could have "just written out the little speeches previous to starting, and sent them in ahead, with every reason to believe they had them down correct."

When the 1871 session got under way, Lewis said the porter had told him about a new ventilation system in the state house that would end all long speeches. Lewis quoted the porter:

"When a feller gets up and begins to hem, and haw, and cough (says the porter), as they always do before launching out with a diatribe as long as the Central Railroad, the Speaker will wink at me, and I will just give this 'ere cord a pull and his wind is all gone; he can't get his mouth open again!" I don't know about the porter; I think someone has been basely deceiving him.

Later in the session Lewis reported that the porter tried the system and, sure enough, it didn't work. Near the end of the session Lewis said that the habit of throwing books, almanacs, apple cores and the like at other members during the proceedings was a common practice.

The other day as one of the gentlemen was making a spirited speech, the general laws of 1867 took him in his chest, and he sat down like a ton of lead, and the cries of "go on!" hadn't the effect to get him up again. Had the book hit him earlier in the session it would have saved the public much wasted money.

But the best satire, the most devastating "put down" of a long winded solon, came early in 1871. Lewis said that one of the representatives had "for a long time been anxious to get himself into THE FREE PRESS." He said he had held out as long as possible and had decided "to swing him in." Without naming the man, he reported that since his speech of the previous day was the most important of the day, he was presenting it in italics.

"MR. PRESIDENT--I am opposed to this bill. It seems to me that I see a scheme here. It seems to me that as law makers we had better look into this bill a little. I am opposed to this bill, Mr. Chairman. I don't like the looks of this bill, Mr. Chairman. I shall not vote for this bill. I don't like its looks."

This is the same speech he gets off two or three times a day, and will answer now for all the session.

Lewis felt that many of the legislators spent more time sitting and visiting than attending to the business of state. He reported in 1869 that the legislative excursion was a "complete success--that is, if it had any particular object in view." But he noted that it was hard on the

taxpayers. Early in the 1871 session Lewis suggested in one of his stories that the legislature employ a full time physician to care for its members. The reason for the suggestion, he said, was that at every morning roll call he heard it announced that some member was sick and desired a leave of absence.

Watching one or two such cases, I have failed to see the flush of fever, attenuated forms, hollow eyes, and can't help but believe that there is a little attempt to avoid the law, which does not provide for absentees unless sick. If a good physician were "on the spot," there is no knowing how many valuable lives he might save.

About a week later Lewis reported that he could pass through the halls and rooms outside the chambers and find members chatting and smoking and paying no attention to what was going on inside. Asked why he was not inside, Lewis said, the member would say he had just stepped out for a drink of water. Lewis suggested that two large water pipes be run through the chambers, perforated with holes just large enough to admit the end of a straw and that each member be provided with straws so he could drink whenever the desire hit him. He referred to the subject of absenteeism several more times during the session.

Some of Lewis' sharpest jabs at the character of politicians concerned their honesty, how well they represented their constituents, and their ambition. In early February, 1871, Lewis reported that a bill was soon to be introduced in the House that would "punish all public officials who

receive more than legal fees, or who are found to be corrupt in their official actions!" He was almost nonplused by the action.

If any Democrat should ask me to "hold his hat," I should tell him to wait until I had got over my own faintness. What's going to become of the present set of public officials, I'd like to know, to say nothing of the country at large.

"There are strange things, Horatio, But stranger things can be."--Muggs.

Lewis' biting comment a week later on the relationship of the legislator to his constituency was even more sarcastic.

It's positively wonderful how a member keeps himself behind the strong arm of his constituents at home. If he wants to favor a particular bill, he does so because his constituents favor it; if he wants to defeat the bill he votes "no" "because, sir, I desire to return home to my constituents with a clear conscience and a record of which I may not be ashamed." From the dog bill up to a two hundred thousand dollar appropriation, the cry of "constituency" can be heard, and it means \_\_\_\_\_."

Less than a week later Lewis reported that an attempt was under way in the Senate to form a fire company composed entirely of senators. But, he noted, "as Senator Sheley, as well as twenty eight other members want to be chief engineer, it is quite probable that the scheme will fall through."

Although Lewis' humorous jabs at politicians showed more development in 1871 than in 1869, his single best piece of political satire—a description of a lazy politician—was written in January, 1869. It was a short essay called "The Easy Man," which Lewis included in his legislative

story on January 19. Although it was mostly a character sketch--an art Lewis would later develop highly as a professional humorist--"The Easy Man" was an excellent satire on a "do-nothing" legislator. 9

While Lewis seemed to delight in poking fun at the politicians, he took equal pleasure in satirizing the legislative process itself. His stories were filled with incidental comments concerning the complex processes involved in getting legislation passed. Once in 1869 and again in 1871 he devoted a lengthy portion of a legislative story to a description—once clearly satirical and once factual—of the process in action.

One of the functions performed by the legislature was the passage of bills to change the names of individuals. In 1869 Lewis reported that he was approached by a young man who had mistaken him for a legislator. The man had to get his name changed before his girl friend would marry him, he said, and he asked Lewis' help. Lewis proceeded to explain the process to the youth and the "explanation" occupied half of a full column in the newspaper. First, Lewis told him, it would cost five or ten dollars to get someone to give notice of the introduction of the bill, then twenty dollars to get the bill drawn up, another ten dollars to get it introduced, a process that should take about a week. Lewis told the

<sup>9</sup> See Appendix A for the complete text of this sketch.

young man he would be able to get board and room for about ten dollars a week while he waited on his bill to get through. Lewis said that after the bill was introduced it would be referred to the committee on "fisheries" whose members would want five dollars each to consider it. He continued in this manner, making it sound as though it would cost five or six hundred dollars to get the bill through. Before Lewis had finished, the youth bolted through the door and took off running. He was not seen again.

The story, undoubtedly mostly if not entirely fiction, is an excellent satire on the way lobbyists bribed their pet bills through the complete legislative process. Lewis wrote a similar item in 1871 with the singular difference that the 1871 piece was a straight explanation of how a person would go about introducing a bill. The 1871 account was humorous, but only because when the legislative process is explained, step by step, it is so involved that it is humorous in itself.

In addition to the complexity of the legislative process, Lewis found humor in the concern over the specific wording of bills. In 1871 he reported that an hour was spent in debate over one word in the title of a bill. He said after the debate had continued for an hour a House member finally had asked that no more be said because the more that was said, the less he knew about the subject. Lewis said he had felt that way himself but hesitated to say

anything. "However," he added, "now that the objection has been removed, I shall keep watch of these know-nothing debates."

Earlier, in 1869, Lewis had reported a debate over a particular resolution that was better than any parody on the subject.

In the House, a day or two since, a resolution was offered instructing the Sergeant-at-Arms to procure two lanterns and hang one over the front steps, and the other at the front gate. One of the members wanted the resolution amended so as to include a lantern at the north gate; this amendment was then amended by prescribing that the lantern should be hung "at or near the said gate." The same amendment having been adopted to include the lantern at the front gate, and seeing that the members were inclined to draw it fine, Dr. Klein, of Wayne, very gravely read his written amendment to the resolution and all the other resolutions, which prescribed "that said lanterns shall be lit at night."

Occasionally Lewis' humor was strained, such as the time in the 1871 session when he reported that the Illinois legislature had requested copies of some of the bills in the Michigan legislature to consider for its own use. Lewis commented:

There is not the slightest doubt but that this Legislature has some of the nicest bills in the pigeon-holes that anyone ever saw, being printed from a beautiful font of small pica type, and on a new Hoe press. Whether there is further merit can be left to the members themselves to judge.

Between the 1869 and the 1871 sessions of the legislature, Lewis had begun producing two regular humor columns for the <u>Free Press</u>. In these columns he had experimented with poetry as a vehicle for his humor. He used a poem to sum up

his feelings, more or less, concerning legislatures and legislators in general. After reporting on January 29, 1871, that the Senate had met the previous morning but had adjourned because no quorum was present, Lewis wrote:

The gravest body has its little tricks,

The stillest Solon has his little plan;

And there are legal legislative "licks"

Which sure would frighten "any other man."

As a legislative reporter Lewis the budding humorist looked at politics and politicians from a mildly sardonic point of view. He was satirical, but rarely vitriolic. He saw politicians as opportunists and politics as a confusing and somewhat ludicrous scramble for government jobs and money. He kept his reportorial eyes open for the misuse of tax dollars, for extreme unscrupulousness on the part of legislators and politicians, and for grossly unfair use of the political spoils system. But mostly he was on the watch for "items," those humorous little incidents that occurred regularly in the legislative chambers, the hallways of the state house, or just about anywhere else. If an incident wasn't humorous in itself, Lewis had a knack for making it so with a certain twist of the pen.

## CHAPTER III

## THE NEGRO OUESTION

In the years following the Civil War, America was generally confused in its attitudes toward the Negro. True, the black people were legally "free," but they were by no means full-fledged citizens with the same rights as the whites. The Fourteenth Amendement, adopted in 1865, gave the black man freedom and citizenship, but it did not give him the privilege of the ballot, nor did it give him "equality." An examination of the newspapers and literature of the period indicates clearly that the whites of the day simply did not consider the Negro their intellectual or social equal. With few exceptions the black man, when he appeared as the subject of an article or a story, was either a nameless, faceless social "issue," or he was a stereotype.

It was through the medium of the Negro stereotype that Lewis achieved not just national, but international, recognition as a humorist. Brother Gardner's Lime-Kiln Club, published in book form in 1882, was, according to one early biographer, "the greatest of all his successes." Lewis

Richard H. Titherington, "Charles B. Lewis: 'M. Quad' of the Detroit Free Press," Golden Argosy, Jan. 8, 1887, p. 88.

"self-improvement" club during his early years at the Free Press. The sketches portrayed the Negro as a stereotype and the dialogue was written in dialect. The club membership included such personalities as Giveadam Jones, Trustee Pullback, Sir Isaac Walpole, Elder Toots and others. If by today's standards the work seems unkind in its portrayal of the Negro, such was not the feeling of Lewis's contemporaries. "'Brother Gardner,'" a Harper's reporter wrote in 1886, "is a shrewd and quaint gentleman of color, who has all the idioms and characteristics of his race, but is not a burlesque of our colored fellow-citizens; he handles his own people gently, but satirizes the foibles, frailties, and weaknesses of the whites inimitably." Other early accounts expressed essentially the same sentiments.

It would be assuming too much to say that Brother

Gardner and the Lime-Kiln Club were conceived during the two

Because of the dearth of critical and biographical material about Lewis, no study has been made of the dates during which the Lime-Kiln Club series appeared in the Free Press. Such a separate study was outside the scope of this thesis. However, none of the stories was found in the Free Press during the period under study. A handbill promoting the London edition of the weekly Free Press, which began publication in 1881, claimed that the Lime-Kiln Club had "a national reputation in America" at that time. See "The Story of the Detroit Free Press," unsigned, undated pamphlet in the possession of George A. Hough, III, associate professor, School of Journalism, Michigan State University, East Lansing.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup>Edmund Kirke, "The City of the Strait," <u>Harper's</u> New Monthly Magazine, August, 1886, p. 346

terms that Lewis covered the legislature. There is insufficient material in the legislative stories to indicate such a direct connection. The "Negro problem" was a major issue in the 1869 session, however, and was not greatly diminished as an issue in 1871. Lewis devoted considerable space in his legislative stories of both years to items concerning the Negro question. Some of the 1871 stories in particular are, in their literary style, strikingly similar to the accounts of the proceedings of the Lime-Kiln Club. Lewis made no attempt to conceal his personal feelings in these stories, although his attitude seems to have changed slightly between the two sessions.

Early in 1869 the proposed Fifteenth Amendment, by which the Negro was given the right to vote, was sent to the states for ratification. It was approved and became effective in 1870. A similar amendment to the Michigan Constitution was taken under consideration early in the 1869 session. The amendment would, among other provisions, have deleted the word "white" from the voting requirements clause of the constitution. Lewis reported this news and, in a later story on January 12, included an "item" that indicated his attitude toward the Negro at that time. The humor was forced and caustic.

As informed in my letter of Saturday, the raid upon the word so obnoxious to the "truly loil" portion of the Michigan public, has commenced. What is to become of the white man, I cannot as yet predict; but I can tell you that the black man's prospects of political freedom

are looking up. As most of the members are well convinced that "the colored troops fought bravely," an amendment to the State Constitution will be made. As said to me by a Republican member, "The Democratic party might as well begin to count nigger noses." Speaking of the "shady" side of politics, reminds me of the white barber who appeared and fixed up a neat little room here just before the session, with the intention of "shaving" every member who inclined to the idea that "this government was created by white men, " &c. Asking him one day the state of trade and commerce at his establishment, he informed me that he must soon "pull stakes," or go into bankruptcy. He charged the same, was a better barber, and had as neat a room as the various negroes in town, but "lather and shave" was the least he did. "No use," remarked he, "a trying to run agin' 'em now, but after they gets the suffrage they are after, there'll be plenty of chance to strop the razor--as the white man'll have to shave the nigger!

On Tuesday, January 26, Lewis reported at some length on the House discussion of the amendment. Lewis said the amendment, which was introduced by Benjamin W. Huston, Jr., of Tuscola County, had been nicknamed "Huston's Nigger Clause" and was drawn up with no intention of getting any but the Negro suffrage portion of it passed. When the House, sitting as a committee of the whole, finally approved a resolution to present the amendment to the electorate, there was nothing left in it but the Negro suffrage clause. After this action, Lewis reported, a move was made to delete the word "male" from the voting requirements, thus giving the vote to women also. That measure lost. Lewis commented:

When this vote was taken, although personally opposed to either woman or Negro suffrage, I could not help thinking how strange and inconsiderate was the action of the majority. The very men who voted to make the idiotic, thick-lipped African their political equals, set a strong and heavy "no" against the attempt of intelligent, thinking, reasoning white women to exercise the freedom of the ballot.

Lewis was not usually so charitable in his comments on women's suffrage; but comparing women with the Negro in such a situation gave him another good "item" for his story.

On February 14 Lewis reported that the resolution had passed the House by a vote of seventy-two to twenty-two. His tone in writing about the measure was much more tempered than it had been before. He did not use the word "nigger," and he was not as open in expressing his personal opinion as he had been in the earlier stories. He ended his report of the action on a note of skepticism, however, and he "got" the two Democrats who voted in favor of the resolution.

It will be endeavored to get this amendment before the people again next spring, and it remains to be seen whether the action of these negro-lovers will be supported by the masses. Franklin L. Smith, of Clinton county, and Kengsley, of Washtenaw, Democrats, voted in favor of the resolution.

Lewis was not in the habit of telling how individual members, even Democrats, voted.

Not until March 5 did the Negro suffrage question come up again. The legislature had under consideration the proposed Fifteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution. This time Lewis got a little carried away with the gravity of the situation and his prose showed the effects of his thinking. Under a sub-headline, "Ho! For the Negro," he wrote that even though the last political campaign had been filled with many promises, the Democratic press had predicted that the Radicals would "force negro suffrage upon the

Northern, as it had the Southern States." But conservatives wouldn't listen, he said, and Radicals branded the prediction a "copperhead lie." Then he added:

To-day has the first step been taken necessary to the complete fulfillment of our prophesy. In a message to the House, the Governor recommended a prompt ratification of the Congressional enactment, which before another year, will give to the American-African the full privilege of the ballot, and place him where the leaders of the Radical party have ever sought and legislated-on an equality with the white mechanic! Seymour, with white men to govern; Grant, and the equality of negroes and white mechanics. O tempora! O mores!

tion ratifying the proposed amendment. He listed the vote, by name, of each member. On March 7 the <a href="Free Press">Free Press</a> editorially attacked the legislature for its action in ratifying the amendment "by a strict party vote." The editorial said that in the spring of 1868 the people of Michigan had rejected by a vote majority of almost 40,000 a new constitution largely because the word "white" had been stricken from the voting requirements clause. It called the action of the legislature "one of the most open and direct insults ever offered to the people of the State by any body of men, claiming to act as their servants."

After that editorial neither Lewis nor the <u>Free Press</u> had any more to say about Negro suffrage during the 1869 session. Early in 1870 the Fifteenth Amendment went into effect. When the 1871 Michigan legislature convened, adult Negro males were fully qualified voters. Lewis devoted about

as much space to the Negro question in his 1871 stories as he had in 1869, but his approach to the problem was different. In the legislative stories for 1869 the Negro was a subject of much discussion, but he never appeared in the stories as an individual. At no time did Lewis refer to a specific Negro person, nor is there any indication that black men appeared in the legislative halls and chambers.

In 1871, however, the Negroes in Lewis's stories were people. They talked, made demands, wrote letters and, from a purely literary point of view, gave Lewis some of the most lively and readable items of the entire session. Whether his attitude underwent any significant change in the period between the sessions is difficult to say. He seemed to be more aware of the Negro as a person rather than as a social or political "issue." But this was directly connected with his improved writing style, which was more anecdotal than it had been in the past. He was critical of the treatment the Negro was receiving (or was not receiving) from the Radical legislature; but this was more damnation of the Radicals than praise for the Negro. Foreshadowing an attitude that would prevail for another century (and is still widespread) Lewis seemed perfectly willing to accept the Negro as "equal" just so long as he remained "separate."

In one of the early stories in the 1871 session,

Lewis told of a Negro man who came to his office to present

a grievance. The man said he had gone to the legislature

and tried to get a job as fireman, doorkeeper, cloak room attendant, porter, postmaster, or any other job he could get but, as Lewis let the man say in a direct quotation, "I didn't get noffin!" Lewis continued to question the man, who gave his name as "Thormus Jackson Haynes." "Thormus" said he had received many promises that he was the man for the job, but when it was all over he had no job. "Whar am I now?" Lewis said he asked. And Lewis himself added:

Yes, "whar am he," the negro, the "amendment," the gentleman who, as a politician, overturned well laid political plans in many a town last fall? Not a one of them has received an office. Not one of them has been recognized as capable of filling the least of the positions in the gift of the House and Senate. They are out of the "ring" entirely, out in the cold, and there isn't even anyone to feel bad about it--except myself.

Lewis walked over to "Thormus," patted him on the head and promised to publish his grievance to the world and to use his "influence" to bring him to the attention of the next Democratic legislature.

That this item expressed Lewis's honest feeling toward the Negro is difficult to believe in light of his other writings on the subject. Lewis was sympathetic toward the "little man," and he probably felt a certain amount of sympathy for "Thormus." But the story seems to have been more of an attack on the Radicals than a support of the

See Appendix B for the complete text of this anecdote.

Negro. From a stylistic point of view the story is remarkable in its resemblence to the Lime-Kiln Club articles Lewis would produce later.

A report more typical of Lewis's style appeared in his legislative story in the <a href="Free Press">Free Press</a> of January 19. He said Lansing, like Detroit, was having a little trouble over the "colored Question."

A singing school is much excited over the attendance of a "Samuel," who insists on mingling his bass with their tenor, much to the disgust of half the attendance, but upheld by the other half. The question: "Is this a white man's singing school?" is being asked on all sides.

Lewis didn't express an opinion in this report, but the problem of Negroes attending white schools was the subject of numerous petitions filed with the legislature. On January 26 Lewis reported that several such petitions had been filed. "The negroes of Lansing are awake to the issue," he wrote, "and a general petition praying that the 'rights' of negroes may be recognized in every school district in the State was passing about among the friends of the African yesterday." He embellished his report slightly by telling about a conversation he said he had engaged in.

"Can't your folks as well have separate schools, and thus avoid the question?" I asked of a negro who was idling around the hall in the interest of the petition.

"Dat am not de question, sah, not at all," he replied. "We'se bin niggers long 'nuff, an' now we'se goin' to hab all de rights ob white folks, or else white folks won't hab no rights left."

I tried to argue with him a little, but he was so positive in his assertions, and kept his mouth open so much of the time, that I could make no headway, and finally guit.

Lewis was not so benevolent in his feelings here as he was with "Thormus Jackson Haynes." But like "Thormus," this black lobbyist, whether real or the product of Lewis's imagination, was a living, talking, believable person.

Lewis filed four more items about the Negro question during this session. On February 16 he told of a "smooth toungued and well dressed negro" who appeared in the halls of the state house and asked to have his card taken to "one of the colored Representatives." Amid much merriment, Lewis reported, the man was told that he was ahead of his time, that there were no such persons in the legislature. Upon learning this he left, Lewis said, "having no desire to witness the legislation not now thought complete without the presence of the tinted element."

On February 22 Lewis filed a brief paragraph reporting that a Senate bill involving free schools for Detroit "is a fine basis on which to build up hopes that the schools throughout the State will, by law, be opened to the admission of negroes." He offered no comment in this report except for his word choice: "to build up hopes." Whether this phrase was meant seriously or sarcastically is not clear. But the final item on the Negro question, which was contained in the legislative story on March 16, indicates no change at

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup>See Appendix C for the complete text of this anecdote.

all in his feelings. He reprinted what he said was a copy of a circular that was being mailed to Negroes throughout the state. The circular, which was filled with misspelled words, was a plea for the Negroes' rights to attend the public schools in the state. The letter appeared to be the work of a most uneducated individual. After reprinting the circular, Lewis commented:

There can be no doubt, in the mind of one perusing the above, that the "right" spoken of would be of considerable benefit to the writer of the circular, whether he believes it or not; but there are some, nay, several, doubts as to the "resultes of the combined efforts." Every member would willingly see the negro well taken care of in the matter of schools, but there are many who do not believe that it is necessary for one to sit between two white children in order to pursue his lessons.

Lewis added a brief paragraph immediately following this item which concerned the standard legislative practice of opening each session with a prayer or brief ceremony by a local minister.

Touching this subject reminds me of the negro parson in this city, who was to be invited to take his turn in House and Senate, but who never was honored with such a notice, owing to the absence of mind of the Clerk and Secretary.

Lewis must have written this last item with tongue in cheek.

The most significant characteristic about the Negro, as he appeared in Lewis's legislative stories, is not the fact that he was presented in a condescending way or that Lewis's personal feelings showed through. What is significant is the different approach Lewis took to his representation of the Negro in the two years. He went from a legislative

and a political problem without life in 1869 to a colorful, vibrant living character in 1871. There is no way to state positively that the characters Lewis portrayed in his 1871 legislative stories are the direct ancestors of his more famous characters in the Lime-Kiln Club series. But the similarities between them are too strong to be overlooked.

## CHAPTER IV

## THE LADIES AND THE BOYS IN BLUE

Two significant social issues facing the Michigan legislature in 1869 and 1871 were the dual questions of civil and social rights for both Negroes and women. If Negroes got official freedom and citizenship in 1865, and the black man the right to vote in 1870, women of whatever color or race were not so fortunate. Not until 1920 did American women gain the right to vote, and there are those who would argue that full freedom and citizenship for women are yet to be granted. But to say that white women, even after 1870, had fewer rights than black men would not be true.

To the American male in the post-Civil War period, the most immediate problem to be faced was not the status of women but the status of the Negro. The war hadn't been fought over women's rights. In 1869 and 1871 most American men, Lewis included, were not paying too much serious attention to the growing women's suffrage movement. But the protestations from a few leaders of the movement were becoming too loud to be ignored completely.

Early in 1869, while the question of Negro suffrage was being discussed, Lewis reported that a petition had been

introduced seeking to give women the vote through a state constitutional amendment. He said, however, that the Negro had priority in the eyes of the Republican legislators and it was unlikely that any action would be taken in behalf of the petition. "The petition will probably be placed under the table," he added. Whether the petition went under the table or elsewhere, it was not brought up again. A few more weak attempts were made to gain women the vote during this session, but they got nowhere in the legislature and received little attention in Lewis's stories.

In 1871, however, with the question of Negro suffrage resolved, women began receiving more attention in their quest for the ballot. In Michigan the high point of the movement in 1871 was a women's convention in Lansing and a visit by the women to the legislature. The leader of the convention and the visit was Susan B. Anthony herself, the pioneer leader in the movement for more rights for women.

Even before news of the convention was announced,

Lewis had begun writing about the movement. "I suppose I

can be allowed to hold my own ideas on the subject of women's

rights," he wrote on January 10. "If so, I have a word or

two to say right here to the ladies." He then said that

two years earlier the legislature had appointed a woman,

Mrs. A. H. Tenny, as state librarian. Lewis said she had

done an excellent job in the position and that he personally

had visited the State Library and had found it in good condition. Then he added the moral to his story:

I don't think the lady would have gained a lot of public respect by tearing around the country as a public lecturer for the last two years, abusing the male sex, the scriptures, the statutes, and the world in general, but, as the official selected to care for the State Library, with its thousands of volumes, its valuable relics, its relics of the sword and the pen, she has filled the position to the satisfaction of every member that has yet dropped into the place.

The story had nothing to do with the current legislative business, but it indicated the general growing concern with the question of women's rights. A few days later Lewis found another story to tell, this one more typical of his humorous outlook on such matters.

Since I last spoke about female rights, I have discovered the subject for another word. One of the town barbers has a "female chair," managed by a young lady of fifteen, and she is said to wield the razor as scientifically as any other barber in the city, and it is also said that a great many gentlemen don't like the fit of the other chairs in the shop, but wait long and patiently to get this particular one, because "it fits the back and shoulders so nicely," you know.

"The angels in hoop skirts" were planning to attempt to gain suffrage through a bill or a constitutional amendment, Lewis reported on January 25. He said he had seen Communications from some of the leaders of the movement. The tone in which the story was written was significant:

Lewis simply didn't take the women seriously. He wrote:

I have seen a petition drawn up by Susan B. Anthony, and it commences with a whereas as long as my thumb, and it goes on to relate the noble influence that such a bill will have upon large women--I mean women at large all over our beautiful State. Little women with curls,

stately women with long trails, angular old maids with false teeth, are all to be included in the bill. Heaven bless the creatures! Let 'em gather together, sign and send in these petitions by the thousands. Let the voice of Anthony roll over the State until the pines of the north bend over and murmur gently to the scrub oaks of the Indiana border. Let the pen of Dickinson throw red hot ink at the head of every member, until they shall cry aloud: "That's enough, old gal--here's your bill!"

He then told of a bill being drafted by a member of the legislature, a portion of which provided "that every female thus exercising the privilege which has pertained to the male sex alone from time immemorial shall don the dress befitting the change."

A few days later, on February 9, Lewis reported that petitions were circulating in the legislature and in Lansing for the enactment of women's suffrage. But he said that it was extremely unlikely that such a bill would be drafted, especially since Anna Dickinson was to lecture that night on the subject of "man's rights." He said the lecture at least acknowledged that men, as well as women, had some rights and that the lecture would only "stimulate a desire to keep them."

On March 2 Lewis reported that the "State Convention of females" was to get underway the following day. Even in his one paragraph report he could not resist some mild sarcasm. "There is no great excitement visible at this writing," he said, "and none of the citizens [has] purchased any new clothes to meet the occasion." If no excitement was visible at that writing, it arrived before the next story was

filed. The women, led by Miss Anthony, converged on the legislature-- and on Lewis.

"For an hour previous to the call to order this morning," he reported on March 3, "the hall was thronged with ladies, some particularly good looking, others particularly homely, but all smiling, nodding, hand-shaking and pleading with the members in favor of woman's rights." He said the press came in for its share of the encounter and he included a table in his story giving his own "statistics":

| Number of handshakes     |     |
|--------------------------|-----|
| Number of smiles         | -22 |
| Smiles back              | -21 |
| Opinions asked           | -24 |
| Opinions rendered        |     |
| Number of ugly females   |     |
| Number of handsome ones  |     |
| Number of Handsome Offes | ~   |

If the last two lines of his "statistics" were not particularly pleasing to some of the women who were present, they were genuine pleasantries compared with some of the comments he would have later.

The most interesting part of this story, however, concerned Lewis's personal encounter with Susan B. Anthony. He related the incident under a separate sub-headline, "Susan B." The humorous account lends itself more to reproduction than description:

Susan B. Anthony was among the number, and she took occasion to say that THE FREE PRESS was the only daily paper in Detroit which had properly appreciated her, or which had touched upon the subject of woman's rights with anything like strict impartiality. Some of the ladies may have a curiosity to know how the introduction was effected. Well, it was like this:

Susan--"Are you THE FREE PRESS reporter?"
(Looking to see if she had a club) "I am."

Susan Bertha Anthony, of Massachusetts.

(Blushing very red) "I h-hope you have--have no designs against my--my charac--against me."

Susan--"None whatever, I assure you."

Both extend right hands.

Both squeeze.

Both blush and squeeze harder.

Both enter into conversation, during which the fact is developed that I always favored woman's rights, and that I always shall.

Several things about this item are interesting. the first place Lewis made himself and not Miss Anthony the brunt of the humor. Anyone who had read Lewis's legislative stories knew that he had never favored women's rights and probably never would; so the last sentence can be accepted as a sarcastic lie, with the joke being on Lewis. But the tone of the story is one of amiability. It sounds as though, despite the tongue-in-cheek final sentence, Lewis and Miss Anthony parted on friendly terms. Yet subsequent stories written by Lewis indicate that his attitude toward the movement (not toward Miss Anthony herself) changed from one of amusement to one of bitter disgust. Finally, a guestion is raised because Lewis quoted the woman as identifying herself as "Susan Bertha Anthony," but the "B." stood for "Brownell." Lewis could simply have been confused by the excitement of the morning, or he could have misunderstood, or he could have thought the "B" stood for "Bertha." Or, the most troubling possibility of all, he could have made up the whole incident.

At any rate he included two more items about the women in this same story. Immediately following the Anthony story he included a one-sentence paragraph under the subheading, "Appropriate."

The clergyman who made the morning prayer took his text with especial reference to the Convention, and read about "tale bearers," "busy bodies," "foolish virgins," and so forth, causing a smile all over the House.

In the final item of this story, Lewis reported that little had been done at the convention itself except to get organized. He said the result of the convention would be the organization of several Sorosis societies in the area and an attempt to get suffrage legislation through the legislature.

The next day Lewis included in his legislative story a short report about the convention. He said the convention was still under way but that not much was taking place. The carnival atmosphere caused by the invasion of the legislature seemed to have worn off. Lewis ended the item on an almost bitter note.

. . . the speeches made yesterday were the same stereotyped ones which have been uttered and published a dozen times in Detroit and other cities. The end will come to-day, and the delegates will go home feeling that they have accomplished--what? About half the delegates were men--a class of she-he's, only distinguishable by their pantaloons.

<sup>1</sup> The Sorosis society was the first women's club organized in the United States.

It was four days before Lewis mentioned the convention again. On March 8 he reported that everyone connected with the convention was thought to have left town, but "one of 'em" had suddenly appeared in the lobby of the house chamber the previous morning and had begun "pounding woman's rights into a member's ear." He continued:

Thinking that it might be well to give her views to the public--nothing having been said about woman's rights lately--I edged up and softly inquired the particulars. She wouldn't give me the first one; all that I could get her to say was she "had a mission," and that she could work it out independently of THE FREE PRESS reporter or any other man.

Until the convention got under way, Lewis had treated the subject of women's rights rather lightly. He had joked, made sly remarks, and generally had fun with the subject. The encounter with Miss Anthony, assuming it really occurred, gave him an "item" with an almost guaranteed readership, and he handled it well. But by March 10 he had grown weary of the movement. The tone of his article that day was somber. "If the phrase 'played out' signifies run to death, gone up, defunct, smashed, busted, and-so-forth," he wrote, "I want to apply it to the whole subject of woman's rights, as here conducted." Then he outlined the activities of the past month.

First there was a lecture, then a State Convention, and then another lecture, then a petition, then another lecture, then an invasion of the building, then two lectures, then a lobby, and last night there was another lecture, admission fifty cents. If any member ever had any idea of voting for the "right," they have had so much cause to be disgusted that not a single individual

can be found to refer to the subject without a "squeamish" feeling. If one or two more "he-shes" will come along and advertise other lectures, the whole thing will wind itself up and dump itself into the Washington avenue mud.

Except for two more rather minor references to the movement, that rather biting item ended Lewis's coverage of women's rights. He had started out treating the topic like a sweet, fluffy tidbit; he ended with a sour taste in his mouth. But if Lewis had slightly mixed feelings about the status of women, he almost never varied in his attitude toward soldiers and veterans. In his eyes veterans of any war deserved the special admiration and consideration of the rest of the populace. A Union veteran himself, he was as sympathetic toward the Rebel veterans as toward his own comrades in blue. Soldiers were soldiers, regardless of the color of the uniform. Interestingly, there was little humor in the stories he wrote about soldiers and veterans.

During the two years in which he covered the legislature Lewis reported on several bills introduced for the payment of bonuses to veterans. In every case he reported either without comment or with a favorable comment on the bill.

Early in each session, during the organization period when the political jobs were being awarded by benevolent legislators, Lewis verbally slapped the hands of the solons for their neglect of the soldier. On January 12, 1869, he reported that a house concurrent resolution to appoint a

former soldier as postmaster had been amended in the senate by inserting another name in place of that of the soldier.

"In the strife for this minor office," Lewis wrote, "occurred a rare chance for discerning the real respect and gratitude borne to soldiers by the radical party." The veteran, Lewis said, was a poor man with a large family to support; the other man was the son of the Lansing postmaster who was, according to Lewis, wealthy. But when the vote was taken, the rich man's son got the job and the veteran was "sent about his business." Lewis was clearly indignant about the situation and devoted considerable space to telling the story.

"Two years ago I chronicled the fact that the claims of several soldiers were ignored in the rush for minor offices in the legislative body," he wrote on January 7. "I am really sorry to have to go over the same ground again, and to have to add more to it." He then told of a one-armed veteran who had sought a particular office but who did not get it; and of a crippled veteran who had a state job but lost it when he opposed the re-election of the representative from his district. He said that one or two other former soldiers wanted minor offices but didn't get them. Then he added a personal comment. "Well, well, I am sorry for the poor fellows," he wrote, "and hope from my heart that if the 'old party' ever gets in power again, it will recognize the claims and privileges of the soldier first of all."

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Lewis's lack of ill will toward the Confederate veterans prompted an emotional report of a committee hearing early in 1869. A previous legislature had approved a resolution whereby the state of Michigan agreed to contribute four thousand dollars to the construction of Antietam Cemetery, the national cemetery at Sharpsburg, Maryland, established after the Civil War. All that remained for the 1869 session to do was to authorize the state treasurer to send the money to the proper source. But a controversy developed when it was learned that both Union and Confederate soldiers would be buried in the cemetery. Lewis's report of the discussion included the following paragraph:

Mr. Swift, of Wayne, took occasion to say that he agreed with a certain Senator, and felt that he "was not only willing that Confederate dead should be buried in Antietam Cemetery but live rebels also." Mr. Swift is a specimen brick of that section of patriots who were perfectly willing their sons should remain at home, and also themselves, and read of wounds and bullets. And the majority of the men who object to laying the remains of a dead Confederate soldier in the same common resting place with those of a Union soldier, have served their country just about as much as Mr. Swift. Soldiers neither talk nor feel thus.

Probably Lewis felt that the war and everything connected with it was just too serious to joke about. Only once did he let a little frivolity slip into a story concerning veterans, and then he used the humor to lead into a serious thought. Late in January, 1871, he reported that the legislature had been asked to pass a bill authorizing the coining of fifty silver metals, to be valued at ten

dollars each, to be conferred on ex-soldiers who had "distinguished themselves by gallant action during the late war."

Lewis commented:

Leaving out the five hundred dollars expense, I think the idea a good one, and speak for half the medals for my own bosom. The rest of the soldiers who distinguished themselves can be content with newspaper paragraphs and additional State bounties. All of our Wolverines behaved so well under fire that it would be invidious to select any fifty men for their daring deeds.

Near the end of the 1871 session, he included an item in his story that summed up his attitude toward soldiers and veterans. On March 29 he reported the discussion of a plan to build a state school for indigent children. He said of the two hundred children who would be wards of the school, about fifty were the children of dead soldiers. "Too much cannot be said in praise of our brave boys in blue, living or dead," he wrote, "and the State cannot be too charitable to the fatherless and orphaned children of the men sleeping their last sleep along the banks of the blue Potomac and the troubled Mississippi."

#### CHAPTER V

## PENAL REFORM AND THE "LITTLE MAN"

The student attempting to analyze Lewis's own beliefs and attitudes as revealed in his writings in the <a href="#">Free Press</a>
must keep in mind one literary historian's observation that
Mark Twain "like all good humorists . . . was a royal liar."
Lewis was precisely that. Yet there were times, especially in his news stories, when one gets the feeling he was embarrassingly honest. He was a backer of the little man, the undistinguished private citizen who, in attempting to make democracy work, often finds himself engaged in battling bureaucracy. But he didn't always back the little man for the right reason.

In February, 1871, after reporting on a controversy in the legislature concerning the state board of health, Lewis commented: "To one who hasn't been sick a day in sixteen years . . . this . . . fight is of interest only so far as the general individual desire to encourage the under dog in a fight." That may not have been the best reason for

Clarence Gohdes, "The Later Nineteenth Century,"
part III of The Literature of the American People, an
Historical and Critical Survey, edited by Arthur Hobson Quinn
(New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1951), p. 716.

supporting the underdog, but it wasn't the worst. The very next day, however, Lewis reported that a Gratiot County man had arrived in Lansing to press his claim against the state for seventeen dollars. He told why he supported the man's claim:

He has already been up to see me, and I encouraged him all I could, because, if there is one thing more than another which I like, it's to see a man "going" for the State of Michigan. It's apt to produce a lively fight, and furnishes the basis for good items.

Lewis was always on the lookout for "good items." Whether his backing of the little man was benevolent or selfish, it furnished him a large supply of such items, especially during the 1871 session.

It was in 1869, though, in March, that Lewis produced one of his first sentimental sketches which, maudlin though it was, must have been moving to <a href="#">Free Press</a> readers. The sketch told of a man who had been convicted of forgery and sentenced to prison for five years. While in prison he was stricken with consumption. His father, "an elderly man, locks tinged with that peculiar gray which denotes that mental grief has hastened the mark of time, eyes downcast, countenance ridged with those heavy wrinkles and furrows

The line between humor and tragedy is a fine one, both genres having many of the same elements simply presented differently or in different contexts. Many of the nineteenth century humorists, Lewis included, produced melancholy, overly sentimental sketches at the same time as they were producing their broadest comedy.

that burdens of care and sorrow, more than age, place there," visited the legislature to seek his son's release. As Lewis described the case: "An inmate of a felon's cell, a viper at his vitals, cast out by all but his kindred, he felt that he must go home to die." Lewis got rather carried away with his prose, but the story had a more or less happy ending. The man was pardoned—the first pardon to be issued by Governor Henry P. Baldwin. And Lewis had himself an excellent "item." 3

The entire question of the little man and the penal system provided Lewis with a continuing story throughout both sessions of the legislature. The story began in 1869 with an account of a man who had been imprisoned for, as Lewis described it, "a murder that he never even had read of prior to his arrest for the horrible crime." Lewis reported on February 16 that the man, Edward Murphy, had appeared before a legislative committee and was the subject of a resolution to recompense him for his false imprisonment. The brief item formed the lead of Lewis's legislative story that day.

Murphy's name was not mentioned again until the last day of the session. The manner in which the case was handled drew a bitter reaction from Lewis. At four-thirty in the afternoon of the final day, he reported, a joint resolution

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup>See Appendix E for the complete text.

was presented in the house which would have required the state to pay Murphy three hundred dollars as soon as the resolution passed and two hundred and fifty dollars every subsequent January 1 until the resolution was repealed.

Lewis wrote:

It had passed the Senate, but before any action could be taken by the House on the report of the committee, members commenced shoving in resolutions of thanks to the firemen and messenger boys, and one member had a State Swamp Land Road bill to pull through, and so Edward Murphy was left lying on the table. Nobody cared to assist his case; Murphy had no rich friends to come up here, and consequently no "enthusiasm" could be started. If he had lobbied to the amount of \$10, his case would have been made a special order.

On January 12, 1871, Lewis reported that the Reformed Dutch Church of Muskegon had introduced a memorial into the legislature seeking to have a law enacted making the crime of murder punishable by the death penalty. He reported the item without personal comment. But later in the same story he devoted a long paragraph to a retelling of Murphy's case. Although he never mentioned Murphy by name in the account, he said he was back to try again. "The case is certainly a remarkable one," Lewis wrote, "and I have no doubt that money will be voted toward some less worthy objects than compensating a citizen for several years' close confinement given him through mistake." He then referred to the memorial mentioned in the earlier paragraph.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup>There was no law in Michigan providing for capital punishment.

This very case seems to be one of the strongest proofs in the world why the prayer of the petitioners should not be granted. Had the gallows been the doom of the prisoner, he would have been swung off, and his corpse mouldered to dust, before the proofs came which declared him innocent.

A few days later Lewis reported the introduction of a petition, apparently from the same church, to make the crime of murder punishable by hanging. He said other such petitions had been introduced and apparently the members of the committee to which such petitions were referred were favorable to such a bill if the prisoner were given a choice between hanging and life in prison. "They believe it a matter of considerable importance to the criminal himself," Lewis added wryly, "whether he shall be hung or shut up, and are willing to give him Hobson's choice about it." Lewis's personal ideas were starting to show: he was a backer of the little man and he opposed capital punishment.

In early February, according to a <u>Free Press</u> story that apparently was not written by Lewis, the Joint Committee on Penal and Reformation Institutions visited the Detroit House of Correction. One of the main ideas of the committee, according to the story, was "the organization of an intermediate prison—something that [was] neither a reform school nor a penitentiary—where persons convicted of misdemeanors and the lighter felonies, persons whose reformation might possibly be effected without the severest and most disgraceful punishment, [could] be confined." The story also

said that the committee was considering "indeterminate sentences," i.e., a system whereby instead of being sentenced to prison for a specific period of time a prisoner would be incarcerated until a "board of guardians" determined that he was ready to be returned to society. 5

On February 11 Lewis reported from Lansing that the Murphy case was "to be taken as a precedent for a bill which [would] secure recompense and indemnification to all innocent persons hereafter unjustly imprisoned." He said he didn't know the details, but he knew the bill was being drafted. Later that month Lewis devoted a long section in one of his legislative stories to a full account of Murphy's case from the murder in 1851 of a ship owner in Mackinaw Harbor to Murphy's supposedly false arrest in 1860 until his pardon a few years later. It was a long and involved story.

Lewis included in his legislative story of February 15 a long paragraph under the sub-headline "Capital Punishment."

He began with a rather sarcastic description of the sensation that one is said to experience while being hanged.

Then he added:

There is very little profit in hanging a criminal. He may leave some mementoes that will sell for something, or a confession that will net the publisher enough for a suit of clothes. But, as a general thing, the criminal can't be afterwards contracted out to make wagons, pitchforks or cigars, and is looked upon as a dead loss. All of which is a prelude to saying that the

<sup>5&</sup>quot;House of Corrections," Detroit Free Press, Feb. 3, 1871, p. 1.

committee to whom the various petitions have been referred on the subject of capital punishment will, in time, report a bill, but recommend that it do not pass, and the bill will be laid upon the table to come up nevermore during this session.

In the same story Lewis reported that a bill would be introduced which would give to the prisoners themselves a certain amount of the money that was earned by the sale of products made by the prisoners. The money would go to them to send home to their families. "There is not only charity toward a fellow being in the idea," Lewis said, "but there is humanity toward his innocent relatives in the measure." He also reported that failing to get a bill to enact capital punishment "without modification," some people were attempting to get a bill that would give judges the power to order a man either jailed or hanged if his sentence exceeded twenty years. Lewis said if such power were given to judges "hanging [would] be as scarce as now."

Although Lewis had not specifically mentioned it in his story, a bill to establish a system of indeterminate sentences had been introduced in the legislature. The bill would have allowed a prisoner to be returned to society when there appeared to the board of guardians "a strong or reasonable probability that any ward [possessed] a sincere purpose to become a good citizen, and the requisite moral power and self control to live at liberty without violating

law. . . " On February 16 the <u>Free Press</u> ran a scathing editorial denouncing the bill. It called it "uptopian" and "impracticable" and said it was "one of the greatest outrages ever attempted to be perpetrated on the people." 7

Lewis himself had not yet referred specifically to the indeterminate sentence concept, so it is impossible to say what his views were prior to this editorial. Considering his views on capital punishment and the idea of allowing prisoners to keep a certain amount of the money they earned for the prison, however, he would have favored indeterminate sentences, it seems logical to assume. But for some reason after the appearance of the editorial, Lewis's legislative stories contained no more items relating to capital punishment or to prison reform. Even his outspoken views on the Murphy case appear to have been tempered somewhat. He wrote four subsequent stories that were more or less critical of the indeterminate sentence bill, but the stories were not written with Lewis's usual flair for verbal attack.

The first story, on February 21, was brief and not very expressive of Lewis's own feelings. He said two evenings had been set aside by the legislature to hear lectures by proponents of indeterminate sentences. Lewis said it would take a lot of work to convince the legislature to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup>Quoted in Detroit Free Press, Feb. 16, 1871, p. 2.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 2.

adopt such a policy. "Dozens scout the idea as absurd," he wrote, "where one has an idea that 'it might possibly' reform the offending."

The next day Lewis included a longer item in his legislative story on the same subject. He said the bill was known as the "soft soap bill" and that there was "not the shadow of a hope that the bill [would] receive more than enough votes to compliment the industry of the gentleman who wasted the midnight oil in drafting it." He said one representative had already drawn up a bill providing that "an angel from Heaven [should] be chairman of the reformatory committee." Then he added:

Not that he or any one else believes that there is no reform for one who has sinned, but because it has come to be generally understood that punishment for crime should not be entirely done away with.

A week later, on March 1, Lewis included a longer item on the bill in which he explained it away as a "vision-ary scheme" that no more than two or three people in the state had ever taken seriously. He said if for some reason the senate and house should both pass the bill it would stand a strong chance of being vetoed by the governor. The tone of the story was the same as that of the critical editorial, only not quite so harsh. On March 19 Lewis reported that the bill had been defeated in the house. He referred to the bill as the "scheme to amend the morals of offenders by making them the wards of demagogues." But he ended his

story on a note which, if taken seriously, had a poignant ring to it. "The only consolation is that which a writer has when his manuscript comes back rejected," he said, "a feeling that the writer is so far ahead of the age that the public cannot appreciate him." Perhaps Lewis had favored the bill after all. Or perhaps he was just being sarcastic.

While the indeterminate sentence bill was being defeated, Murphy's case was still pending. But either the case was beginning to appear less clear cut than it had originally, or Lewis's attitude was beginning to change slightly. On February 24 he wrote that it was beginning to look doubtful that the case would be decided. He said the investigating committee had not found any papers or persons favorable to Murphy and that even the papers that had caused the governor to issue the pardon were not available. "If the man has any friends," Lewis wrote, "they had better bestir themselves, if they hope to get his claim properly before this body."

It was a month before Lewis mentioned Murphy again, and the story showed a clear change in attitude. He reported on March 25 that another case similar to Murphy's had been brought before the legislature, and that the man involved had asked for relief. But Lewis said if he wanted "pecuniary remuneration" he wouldn't get it because the legislature would not vote any more money to anyone unless it was asked for by state institutions. To do so, he said, would "open

the door to let in half a dozen other and similar cases."

He said a committee report on Murphy would be made the following week but that it would either be unfavorable or would be given without recommendation. He said about twenty-five affidavits relating to the case had been found but that they all had been prepared especially to win the case. He said former Governor Henry Crapo, who was by this time dead, had been heard to say he felt he "had been victimized" in his pardoning of Murphy. Lewis wrote finis to the Murphy case in a paragraph that sounded different from anything he had had to say about the case previously.

It would seem as if an innocent person should be in some way remunerated for the mistake of judges and jurors, but, in most cases, the pardoned person should feel that getting pardoned out at all was worth a round sum, for it is only now and then that an innocent person sent to State Prison can establish the fact that he is unlawfully incarcerated.

Lewis had no more to say about Murphy. If the committee report was ever given, Lewis did not report it. Something obviously had changed his mind. He could have become convinced that Murphy wasn't innocent after all, or that if his case should set a precedent the state would be innundated with other cases, most of which would not be legitimate. His editors could have put some pressure on him over his generally liberal attitudes toward capital punishment and penal system reform. Whatever the reasons for dropping Murphy so suddenly, the "little man" and the attempts at reforming the penal system had provided Lewis with some of his best "items."

### CHAPTER VI

# JUST FOR FUN

Much of the material that Lewis included in his stories from Lansing had little if anything to do with legislative matters. Occasionally, particularly during periods of recess, he would file stories that were not supposed to be legislative news. These stories concerned events in the Lansing area that, for one reason or another, Lewis chose to write about. While the legislature was in session he occasionally would include in his legislative stories paragraphs of non-legislative news dealing with such subjects as accidental deaths, interesting court cases, or weather news. But there were few legitimate news items of this type included in the legislative stories. Simply covering the activities of the legislature must have kept him sufficiently busy without attempting to cover general news of Lansing.

The legislative stories did, however, include a considerable amount of non-news material: character sketches, personal observations about various topics, and brief humorous essays. It is impossible to tell whether most of this material was based on fact or was the product of Lewis's imagination. Some of it seems to have been pure fantasy;

some of it may have been true--factual reporting of a humorous or unusual event. Whichever the case, it is in the extraneous articles and paragraphs that the beginnings of Lewis's humorous style can be seen most clearly.

A common form of the humor of the day was the pun. Typically, to call the reader's attention to the joke and to proclaim it as intentional, puns were italicized. Lewis sprinkled a few of them throughout his legislative stories, mostly in 1869, and most of them were bad--even for puns. A debate over whether to hire a stenographer for a Wayne County court prompted Lewis to observe: "Some long winded members, who could not write short-hand, thought good stenographers could be had at \$3 per day." And in the same story he included a sort of a pseudo-pun: "A paper mill is about the only subject excited, but that has only been erected on paper, as yet." During the legislative excursion of 1869, Lewis reported on a party at which a series of toasts was offered. One of the toasts was to "the press," and it was responded to by Senator Edward G. Morton of Monroe, himself a newspaperman. But, Lewis noted, "time pressed, and he had no time to talk."

Occasionally the humor took the form of a wisecrack.

Near the end of the 1869 session, Lewis reported that the secretary of the senate had been presented a "handsome gold watch chain" by the members. "The gift was well meant,"

Lewis wrote, "but it's like presenting a curry-comb to a man and asking him to buy a horse to use it on."

menting with some forms of visual humor. He had started writing a daily account of the activities of the police court in Detroit and had developed a style in which the last few words of a paragraph or poem would be set in small capital letters on a separate line, thus forming a sub-headline that read out of the previous paragraph and introduced the one following. The technique was well handled and was effective in the police court stories. He tried it again in one of his legislative stories near the end of the 1871 session, but it didn't work. The material of the stories didn't lend itself to such gimmickry.

Another visual device worked a little better in the legislative stories, albeit not much better. The governor addressed the legislature at the beginning of each session and his speeches were translated into Dutch and some other languages. In February, 1871, Lewis reported that he had been studying a copy of the Dutch translation of the speech and was "much surprised" to see that the translator had changed some of it.

For instance, where his Excellency recommends an appropriation for a chemical laboratory at the Agricultural College the pamphlet says that

<sup>1&</sup>quot;From Lansing," Detroit Free Press, Feb. 12, 1871,
p. 1.

"De grevraagde prijis wordt door deskungigen als zeer redehjk beschouwd."

And, as if that wasn't enough, it adds . . . .

He then gave two more quotations in Dutch and continued to talk about the "changes." The humor, of course, was that neither Lewis nor his readers--most of them anyway--had the slightest idea what the translation said. But it was the type of humor that had to be printed--it wouldn't work orally.

Lewis had a fascination for unusual names. The man who would later produce such characters as Giveadam Jones and Elder Toots may have developed this interest while writing his Central Station Court series. Names played a big part in the humor of that series, which he began in 1870. He showed a marked interest in names in his 1871 legislative stories, but the interest had not been so apparent in 1869. Just after the senatorial election in 1871, in which the candidates were Austin Blair and T. W. Ferry, Lewis wrote that he hoped no boy baby had been born in Lansing during the previous few days. "If such is the case," he wrote, "he's a 'Blair' or a 'Ferry' sure, and must go struggling through life under the grievous burden of the cognomen."

Three times during the 1871 session Lewis referred to unusual place names in Michigan. The first reference was in one of those items that had nothing to do with legislative matters, but made interesting reading. "It looks

barbarous," he wrote on January 22, "whether it is or not, to read, in Bret Harte's poems, or in a California publication, that some one was murdered at 'Gouge Eye Gulch,' or that a thief was hung at 'Dead Man's Corners.'" But he said some equally notorious names could be found in some northern counties of Michigan. He then included a long list of names such as Bad Ax, Pine Stump Corners, Snake Valley, Dead Sailor's Point, Dirk Knife Flats, Gallows Hill, Cutthroat Creek, etc. Near the end of the session, in an item about the newly-released census figures, Lewis included a paragraph that began: "Among the townships having odd names are . . . " He then listed forty-two names of townships, including Gore, Texas, Sleeping Bear, and Raisin.

Earlier he had devoted a long portion of one of his stories to a rather minor bill because he was intrigued with an unusual name. His lead on the item began:

'Tell me of the legend of Clamunion,' I asked of a Western county member the other day, and, after we had filled our pockets with apples, proceeded down cellar to the furnace, and [had] driven the firemen off their seats, he began to inform me of the cause of the outrageous name which appears in a certain bill 'To organize the Township of Clamunion, in the unorganized County of Missaukee.'2

Lewis told the complicated story of how the name came to be chosen--a story that involved a stream named Clam Creek and a group of veterans who had fond memories of the union before the war. In telling the story Lewis brought in more

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup>Ibid.

humorous names--Red Dog Corners, Dead Horse Ditch, and others. The story may or may not have been true, but Lewis seems to have had a great deal of fun in telling it.

He included in one of his legislative stories a still longer tale that probably was fiction. It was a story about a widow named "Clemmer" and her ten-year-old son, "Marky." Widow Clemmer wanted to change Marky's name to something more "high sounding," and, so the story went, she had been directed to Lewis as one who could help her. After suggesting names for fifteen minutes, all of which were unsuitable to the woman, Lewis suggested that the boy take his name, which he told her was "Mikadoraorariggige-linker." The woman realized he was making fun of her and she stormed out of his office. Lewis ended the anecdote with a profession of innocence:

I hadn't the least idea of offending the lady. There's no knowing how soon any of us may be left a widow with one son, but I really wanted to encourage the boy in starting out right in the world.<sup>3</sup>

The story was well written and was remarkebly similar to the type of sketch Lewis would later produce for his humor columns.<sup>4</sup> Lewis's legislative stories contained several

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup><u>Ibid</u>., Jan. 15, 1871, p. 1.

A case could be made for calling the tale "social satire," but it seems more likely that Lewis used it as nothing more than a funny story. The line between simple humor and more sophisticated satire is a fine one, and Lewis was basically a humorist, not a satirist.

sketches or tales of this type. Some of the stories may have been based in fact; some may have been fiction. Some of them, such as "The Easy Man," were vehicles that Lewis employed to convey his satirical views. Others, such as the one above, seem to have been merely entertainment. The rest fell somewhere between these two extremes.

Whatever their purpose, and whether their basis was in fact or in fancy, the sketches tended to fall into three broad and indistinct categories. Not infrequently a sketch would fit in more than one category, or the categories themselves would overlap. The first category, and probably the most significant as far as Lewis's development as a humorist is concerned, was that of the character sketch. It was Lewis's ability to create many different types of humorous characters that helped him achieve fame as a humorist. In the sketches included in the legislative stories, the characters were not necessarily fully developed. like the porter whose ventilation system was supposed to take the wind out of the speakers, they may only have received passing mention from time to time; but they were presented in such a way that the reader saw them as real people. On the other hand they were occasionally, like "The Easy Man" and "My Rural Friend," ather carefully portrayed,

See Appendix F.

considering the time and space Lewis had available to him and the fact that he was supposed to be reporting legislative news, not writing humorous sketches.

Another category, which was really a sub-category of the character sketch, was made up of sketches dealing with peddlers or agents. The separate category is used because the agent, the forerunner of the traveling salesman and the descendent of the yankee peddler, was a common subject of other humorists of the nineteenth century.

The third category contains sketches that did not necessarily deal with individuals. People sometimes were included in them, but they were not drawn as recognizable types, and the nature of the individual was not as important as the events in which he was involved.

In both 1869 and 1871 Lewis included in his stories sketches about rural people coming to visit the legislature. A sketch written in 1869 concerned a man from Gratiot County who came to town to see the "Legislaychure" and left about a week later after being "taken" by some gamblers. 6

It was a humorous little item, but was not so well-written or as carefully drawn as some later ones. In a sketch written in 1871 Lewis told of a rural family who appeared in the house during a debate over a contested seat. They stayed all day long, through lunch and dinner hours, until

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup>See Appendix F.

the case was decided at eight o'clock that night. All the while the man was "lively as a bug," paying rapt attention. When the case was decided Lewis approached the man and asked him if the decision went to suit him.

'Wall can't say,' replied the man, brightening up, 'because I didn't exactly get to know what they were talking about. But I was bound to see 'er through, if it took till daylight.'

That story may have been true, or at least based in fact. At any rate it was well written and interesting. 7

During the legislative excursion of 1869, Lewis included a humorous sketch about "a friend" who had drunk too much champagne. The man had gone to his room to put on a clean "French yoke" but by mistake had gotten hold of a piece of feminine attire and "was carrying on like a lunatic because the laundress had forgotten to starch the bosom to the proper stiffness!" The friend in the sketch bore a startling resemblance to Mr. Bowser, the harried husband who would become one of Lewis's most popular humorous characters in later years.

In 1871 Lewis attempted something that seems not to have worked very well, although it isn't clear exactly what he was trying to do. Early in the session, on January 10, he reported that he had met his "enemy," who refused to make peace with him on any terms. He didn't elaborate on that

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup>See Appendix G.

statement; but he added that he had also met his "affinity."
He said the man was a member of the house and

I am going to call him Chain Lightning. I have named him thus because he is the most genial, lazy, good natured man in the world, and never bothers himself with more than one care--to get his meals on time. When he sits down he drops like a bag of shot, and when he says anything he puts a period after each word. He says he's going to have a good time here this winter, and I'll bet no other man will get the chance to move an adjournment or recess when my old friend is present. He's going to be a big fund of information to me this winter. 8

Throughout the rest of the session "Chain Lightning" appeared frequently in Lewis's stories. He was usually being quoted in some innocuous way, or was supposedly proposing a humorous speech or bit of legislation, such as a "a bill to encourage raising oysters in this State." Only once was he quoted at any length and that was near the end of the session when he supposedly made a speech more or less in support of a bill authorizing the state to turn over the dead bodies of paupers to the University of Michigan Medical School. Lewis said "Chain Lightning" had written out his speech in advance, "knowing that the reporter would want it." His speech sounded as though it had been written by Lewis him-He said that after death it would be nice to be buried in a nice clean grave with posies blooming over it, but he wouldn't know about it and if his body would add to the knowledge of the world he wouldn't mind giving it to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup>Detroit Free Press, Jan. 10, 1871, p. 1.

science. It wasn't really a good speech from either a humorous or a serious point of view. After Lewis's report of that speech, "Chain Lightning" disappeared from the stories. It seems as though Lewis had plans for the character that never fully developed. Or it may all have been part of an inside joke between Lewis and whoever served as the model for "Chain Lightning."

During this session Lewis reported personal encounters with four different agents, each seeking Lewis's assistance in getting his product purchased by the state or by members of the legislature. In almost all the cases Lewis adopted the role of an innocent bumbler who, in attempting to help the agent, succeeded in guaranteeing that his products would have no sale at all. The accounts took the form of short essays, written in such a way that the reader realized it was all a put-on, Lewis deliberately defeating the agent's purpose while professing extreme naivete.

by a man with a package under his arm and, thinking the package was some sort of gift for him, Lewis let the man talk. Then the man revealed that the package was a machine for making gas which he wanted to sell to the state to be used in the legislative chambers for lighting. "I told him I didn't take any interest in it," Lewis reported, "but he went down and bought the cigars, procured a sleigh to take

me home to dinner, and I at last agreed to help him get a resolution through the Senate to allow him to light that chamber with his new kind of gas."

Lewis said he spoke to all the senators in person with the result that they voted down the new gas. Later Lewis said he found another box of cigars on his table with a note from the agent asking him not to speak to members of the house in behalf of the invention. "However, I will," Lewis wrote. "I think it's the best thing I ever saw, and if I knew the name of it, or how it works, or the agent's name, or the company manufacturing it, I should send them my written certificate as to its virtues."

A month later Lewis added a mysterious footnote to this story. On March 1 he reported that a stranger named Tyrell, who had come to the area two weeks earlier and had gone to work for a farmer, had been found dead in his room, apparently from an overdose of laudanum or opium. "His papers show that he came here from Chicago," Lewis wrote, "and a pawn ticket for a silver watch was among his personal effects." A week later Lewis reported that the man had turned out to be the gas agent. Lewis ended the item with a not particularly funny attempt at humor.

Discouraged at the obstinacy of [the senate[ and not half believing in the good qualities of the improvement he agented, he retired from the city, became disgusted with the world, and stepped out of it during a lonely

night, leaving his situation open to the next. The incident should be taken as a warning by all other persons who design to bother this body. 9

Shortly after his encounter with the gas peddler,
Lewis reported that another agent was present trying to sell
the legislators some new kind of ventilator system. Lewis
said he was not successful. About the same time Lewis encountered what he called in a sub-headline "A Delicate
Situation." He was accosted by a female Bible-seller. She
wanted Lewis's opinion as to whether she should remain in
Lansing an extra day to try to sell her Bibles to members
of the legislature. He passed up the opportunity for a
practical joke, but he told why in his story.

Now, I had sat with the legislative body four weeks, knew every man of them, and could tell her exactly. But, here she was, on expense, anxious to proceed to the next town, and, after a long struggle as to whether I should tell her my honest sentiments, or see her go to two or three dollars additional expense, victory at last rested with conscience, and she took the first train out of town. 10

Lewis said he didn't mean that the legislators were not religious, but, he added with tongue in cheek, he knew that every member of the body already had a Bible and wouldn't want another one. If the woman had been a man, Lewis admitted, he would have encouraged him to stay and "he'd probably have left Lansing feeling that he only wanted the one consolation of punching my head."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup>Ibid., March 7, 1871, p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., Feb. 8, 1871, p. 1.

Lewis "got" another agent in a subtle way. Under the sub-headline "A Puff" he wrote"

The reader will notice how splendidly these letters stand out in bold relief against the white background, and how correctly every word is spelled. This is the result of a new kind of pencil which an agent is here to introduce. He desired me to try one in writing this letter, and, if satisfied, to give him a fifty dollar "puff" in exchange. I would accordingly say that it's the best pencil I ever saw, and hope that everyone using pencils will buy of him. 11

Besides the obvious sarcasm, Lewis "forgot" to mention either the name of the agent or the brand of his pencil.

In addition to these sketches, many of which probably were embroidered by Lewis's pen, he included in his legislative stories other sketches that probably were factual, but still were amusing. Just about all of the sketches of this type appeared in 1871, after his writing style had matured. They ranged from a slightly humorous account, touched with cynicism, of how Washington's birthday was almost ignored in Lansing to a tall tale about a senator who was having meal problems at his boarding house. Understatement was often the key to the humor of these sketches. Lewis's best use of understatement was in a story he told about a man who approached a senator in the chambers and asked for a private word with him. He led the senator

<sup>11 &</sup>lt;u>Ibid</u>., Feb. 17, 1871, p. 1.

 $<sup>^{12}</sup>$ Some of these sketches are reproduced in Appendices H through K.

outside the building, got as far as the gate, and was trying to get the legislator to walk with him to his hotel before the senator ordered him to state his business. According to Lewis the man looked at the senator and said:

Well, you see, I'm a stranger here, looking 'round a bit, and I wanted to ask you a fair question. I hain't seen a well day in fourteen weeks; look at them hands (holding them up), and see the fur on my tongue (sticking it out.) Them's the result of ager, them is, and now I want you to tell me, 'pon honor, whether you think this mineral water will help me any. 13

Lewis ended the story with the observation that "Some people may think that the Senator didn't make any reply, but he did."

These miscellaneous sketches gave Lewis a chance to practice his ability to write brief, humorous anecdotes while "informing" his readers of some of the lighter incidents that he witnessed. The miscellaneous sketches, combined with the character sketches, were the beginnings of Lewis's real work as a humorist. When, not so many years later, the names of M. Quad and the humorous characters he created became commonly known in Michigan and the nation, the sketches and the characters would not be much different from those that he produced as a legislative correspondent.

<sup>13</sup> Detroit Free Press, Feb. 26, 1871, p. 1.

### CHAPTER VII

### TRIALS AND ERRORS

Since no autobiographical material about Lewis has been found, and the veracity of much of the biographical material is questionable, his career can best be traced through his writings. Although his legislative stories do not reveal too much of a personal nature, they are helpful in piecing together his development as a writer and reporter. In one of the earliest stories, Lewis commented on what must have been a very real problem for him. "Known as a Democrat, and representing the leading Democratic organ of the state," he wrote, "of course there is not much of a rush of the Republican members to inform me of the various little wires pulled on [Chandler's] re-nomination, but one occasionally stumbles on a 'wire' by accident." Yes, a Democratic reporter going it alone in the Radical Republican legislature, outnumbered by competing reporters from Republican newspapers, could have expected problems.

Lewis seemed to have been less sure of himself, and just a little more careless with his facts, during the 1869 session than he was two years later. The first time he identified a legislator by name and party, he got the party

wrong. On February 19, 1969, he reported that "Mr. Harris, of Wayne (Rep.) . . . " had made a statement about state expenditures. Two days later he corrected what must have been an embarrasing error. Under the sub-headline "Erratum," in the middle of the regular legislative story, Lewis wrote:

Between the compositor and myself, Mr. Harris of Wayne, was yesterday reported as a Republican. He don't 'train in that company,' but, on the contrary, is one of the staunchest and ablest of our minority, always lending his voice and influence in favor of economy and reform in the public expense, and bitterly opposing any matter that looks like a swindle on the hard-working tax-payers. Would that we had a majority composed of just such unflinching economists as he.

If Lewis went overboard in correcting the mistake, there may have been some good reasons for it. A Democratic reporter should have known all of the representatives of his own minority party, and especially those from the county in which his newspaper was published. Lewis himself apparently did not and had not lived in Detroit at this time; he was still a resident of Lansing. But that was no excuse for a <a href="#">Free</a>
<a href="#">Press</a> reporter not to know the politics of the Wayne County representatives. The dividing of the blame between himself and the compositor could be interpreted either as a manganimous genture on his part if the error were really the fault of the compositor, or as a rather underhanded move if the fault were all his own. But the real reason he devoted so much space to correcting the error probably had something to do with the fact that he was at that time involved in a

heated feud with the Advertiser & Tribune. The feud was the outgrowth of another apparent mistake on Lewis's part a few days earlier.

On February 14 his regular legislative story was preceded by a long list of notaries public who had been confirmed by the senate. Such lists were routine, an earlier one having run in January. Other such lists would be published throughout the rest of the 1869 session and through all of the 1871 session. Why the lists were considered so important is not too clear, except that appointment as a notary public was one way of making money during a period when jobs were not too readily available. The newspapers probably were the first sources by which candidates learned that their appointments had been confirmed. In any event Lewis got "scooped" on the list by the rival of the Free Press, the Republican Advertiser & Tribune.

On Tuesday, February 16, after opening his story with some routine items, Lewis included the following paragraph under the sub-headline, "A Contemptible Act":

It was of course known to the several reporters that a large number of notaries would be confirmed on Friday. This confirming can only be done by the Senate, in executive session, the list not even being given to the clerk until such time arrives—being retained by the chairman of the Judiciary Committee. This gentleman, Mr. Williams, refused several papers the list, and such action was very proper, until the executive session had acted upon it; but the Private Secretary of the Governor, Mr. Russell, was more liberal. He let the Advertiser & Tribune have the list at least ten days

previous to its being acted upon by the Senate, so that a private telegram could set the names in print one day in advance of competitors. When the names were being put in type in the office of the Advertiser & Tribune, they had not even been confirmed, and half of the list was liable to have been stricken out.

Lewis may actually have been indignant over what he believed was an unethical act on the part of the governor's secretary and the reporter for the Advertiser & Tribune. But the tone of his paragraph, and subsequent developments, make it seem more likely that he was simply a reporter who had been scooped and was trying to explain to his editor how it had happened by shifting the blame.

The following day the Advertiser & Tribune answered Lewis's charges in a brief but caustic paragraph on page one.

SILLY FALSEHOOD--We have not the distinguished honor or pleasure of the acquaintance of the Lansing reporter of the Free Press, but he must be a near relative to a jackass, if not the actual owner of long ears. In yesterday's edition he stated that the Private Secretary of the Governor furnished the ADVERTISER AND TRI-BUNE the last list of Notaries ten days before they were sent into the Senate for confirmation. The statement is a pure fabrication. He did not furnish the list ten days nor one day before they were sent in. did not reach us until the evening of the day of their confirmation, and had the reporter of the Free Press been awake enough to get the wax out of his eyes, he could have copied them and had them in here by the same mail.1

This was too much for Lewis. In addition to calling him a liar and a jackass, the article made him look inept as a reporter. And if, as seems likely, his editor was unhappy with him for allowing himself to be scooped on a routine list, then he had to do some more explaining.

<sup>1</sup> Detroit Advertiser & Tribune, Feb. 17, 1869, p. 1.

His next blast appeared in his legislative story on February 19 under the sub-headline, "How a Radical Reporter Lied." Lewis said that the governor's secretary explained that two lists of the notaries had been made. He said that on Thursday night before the Friday on which the names were confirmed, the Advertiser & Tribune reporter had asked permission to make an advance copy of the list and was refused. But finally, Lewis continued to quote Russell, the reporter was told he might make the copy "provided, expressly, that all the other reporters should have the priviledge of copying at the same time. . . . " Lewis said his rival lied by telling the other reporters that they could not get an advance copy, then went ahead and made his copy in advance. Lewis said he and a Detroit Post reporter got a copy of the list on Friday and sat up nearly all night making copies of it ". . . and, moreover, believing that the Advertiser and Tribune reporter was ill, also made him a copy." That part of the incident must have infuriated Lewis. He concluded:

Before we had our copies mailed, the "live" reporter had his in print. The epithet of "jackass" used in the article yesterday will as well suit other shoulders, as the list of the Advertiser and Tribune was so grossly incorrect, and so thoroughly muddled, as to receive not only the censure of scores of members, but of the Govenor himself; while but two names, of the whole 1,400 published in THE FREE PRESS, were even incorrectly spelled.

If the writer of yesterday's article "has not the distinguished honor of my acquaintance," it is perhaps altogether better for me. Your compositor made me say ten days, where it should have read one. This will

partially exonerate Mr. Russell and satisfy the <u>Advertiser</u> and <u>Tribune</u> that its weekly column of "Religious" does not assist its reporters to get advance copies of matters of general interest.<sup>2</sup>

In a grudging way Lewis was admitting he was wrong about the governor's secretary and was apologizing to him. He also admitted, although he blamed it on the compositor, that the "ten days" was an erroneous statement. The tone still seemed to be that of an explanation aimed at his editors more than anything else. Certainly such matters could not have been of particular interest to the general public.

The Advertiser & Tribune ended the feud on February
22 with a witheringly sarcastic blast at Lewis under the
headline, "Dies Irae."

Wh-oo-o-s-h! 'Angels and ministers of grace defend us!' The Free Press correspondent, having devoted himself with considerable fervor to the business of mis-representing the Governor's Private Secretary, has now turned his attention to me, and abuses me with a savage heartiness and good will, that, rather commands my attention.

The reporter said he had no doubt that he and Lewis could get a lively fight going but since the matter was of no interest to the public he would drop it with a general denial of all the charges. He said he was grateful that Lewis had confined his charges to "lying and stealing, and did not include

Detroit Free Press, Feb. 19, 1869, p. 1.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup>"Dies Irae" is Latin for "day of wrath," and is the title of a Latin hymn on the Day of Judgment, sung in requiem masses in the Roman Catholic Church.

murder and treason and other like offenses against the decalogue and the state law." His sharp sarcasm made Lewis look silly, yet he did not specifically deny any of Lewis's statements. Lewis's second account of the incident was probably close to the truth. If so, professional ethics notwithstanding, it became simply a case of Lewis having been scooped and trying to talk his way out of it.

Shortly after the affair with the notaries Lewis blundered again, although the mistake doesn't appear to have been a major one. He identified the wrong legislator in a story and, two days later, corrected the mistake.

By 1871 Lewis, now 29 years old, seemed to be more sure of himself both as a writer and as a reporter. He had been with the <u>Free Press</u> for two years. He had begun a fairly regular column in the paper, "M. Quad's Epistle," and "An Hour at the Central Station Court" had been a daily feature until he returned to Lansing in January, 1871. If he had been nervous about making good in 1869, he probably was no longer troubled by that particular worry. But at the same time he seemed to be a bit more cautious with facts than he had been earlier.

Shortly after the senatorial election of 1871, Lewis reported that he had tried to interview the losers "but with meager results." He said they were in a hurry and he had forgotten his pencil, but he listed three quotations from the men that he said he thought were correct. Then he

repeated the qualification. "I think I am right in their various expressions," he wrote, "but will cheerfully stand corrected if any of them say so." This didn't sound like the Lewis who had gotten into a printed shouting match with his competition two years earlier. A few days later he again hedged slightly after quoting some facts. He reported that the amount of money requested by the various state agencies amounted to \$684,150 and that the last time he had checked the state treasury contained \$458,307.97. But, apparently still a bit nervous about inaccuracy, he added: "If I have placed any of the figures too high, they can bear a good deal of 'trimming' and yet have the appropriations drain the State Treasury of every cent in it."

Lewis disliked apologizing or having to admit a mistake. His reaction in the case of the list of notaries indicated that. But when he did apologize, he usually had the last word. About the middle of February, 1871, he said that he had hurt the feelings of one of the firemen (boiler or furnace tenders) by writing that they used state reports instead of pine knots to start the fires. He said he had to apologize to the offended fireman.

I don't think he has ever used a single pamphlet under the furnace, or, for a day past, anything else, as the Hall has been so cold that members have shivered and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup>Detroit Free Press, Jan. 13, 1871, p. 1.

"ho-hummed" at a fearful rate, and one of them has been obliged to resort to an ague cure. If this apology doesn't satisfy the man, I shall have to think of some other way. 5

Lewis was sounding downright cocky. But he had reason to be a little brash. He had provided the <u>Free Press</u>, and himself, with a "beat" that took away any of the stigma that was left over from the situation with the notaries.

One of the first major events in each of Lewis's two years as legislative correspondent was the governor's speech to the legislature. In the speech the governor outlined the programs and plans of his administration for the coming two years. It was an important message. Both years the Free Press ran the complete text of the speech. 1871 the text of the speech was carried on Thursday, January 5, the day the speech was given in Lansing. The next day, January 6, Lewis reported in a story datelined January 5 that the governor had delivered his speech at 10:30 that morning. But, he added, readers of the Free Press would already have seen "an accurate, verbatim copy before the Governor [had] read the first line." It was fast work on Lewis's part. On Sunday, January 8, he explained how he did it. His story ran on page three under a five-deck headline:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup><u>Ibid</u>., Feb. 15, 1871, pp. 1,4.

## A MILE A MINUTE.

A Reporter's Ride on a Locomotive.

A RACE AGAINST THE TELEGRAPH.

How Steam Beat Electricity.

AND THE FREE PRESS GOT THE NEWS.

The story ran almost one and one-half columns. Lewis explained that in 1869 the governor had his speech printed before going to Lansing and that he had left copies in Detroit where the newspapers could get them. But in 1871 the governor's secretary, Frank Russell (the same one Lewis had blasted during the controversy over the notaries) had given copies to the Detroit reporters at three o'clock Wednesday afternoon, the day before the speech was to be delivered. Lewis said he went to the telegraph office but was told it would take ten hours to send the 10,000-word message. Whether the idea was Lewis's own, or that of someone else on the Free Press, is not clear, but, instead of being stymied by the problems of telegraphing the message, he rushed one-half mile to the railroad station where, after a bit of confusion, he rented a new locomotive, the North-Lewis rode the Northward to Jackson, hitting en route the then unbelievable speed of sixty miles an hour, and made connections with the Michigan Central fast express that left Jackson for Detroit at 4:30.

Lewis gave his copy of the message to the baggage man to deliver to the <u>Free Press</u>, and he returned to Lansing aboard his rented locomotive. The story, especially since it was true, made exciting reading.<sup>6</sup> And it made good promotional material for the Free Press.

"A Mile a Minute" may very well have secured Lewis's position on the Free Press. The story received state-wide attention and apparently was the first of his work to bring him any significant praise from other newspapers. On January 10, two days after the story appeared, the Free Press reported in an editorial that the Advertiser & Tribune was "not pleased with the enterprise exhibited by THE FREE PRESS in publishing the Governor's message." The editorial quoted the Advertiser as saying that the Free Press paid forty dollars more than the other two papers for a perfect copy of the speech. But it also quoted its competitor as saying that the version published by other newspapers contained many "regretted imperfections."

The <u>Free Press</u> frequently ran, on Sundays, a selection of comments about itself taken from other newspapers.

On January 15, the Sunday following publication of Lewis's story, the paper ran ten such comments under the headline:

"FREE PRESS ENTERPRISE/Commendations of the State Press."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup>See Appendix L for complete text. A modified version of this article appeared later in Lewis's book, "Quad's Odds."

All the comments praised the action of the newspaper in hiring a locomotive to get the governor's message in print early. Three of the comments praised the newspaper itself, four of them praised the Lansing reporter, and three of them praised "M. Quad" or "Quad" by name. The <u>Owosso Press</u> called Lewis's story "one of the most exciting and thrilling narratives we have read for many a day."

On January 17 the <u>Free Press</u> reprinted a paragraph from the Albion <u>Recorder</u>, a Republican paper, attacking its competitor, the <u>Democratic Albion Mirror</u>. The <u>Recorder</u> said:

The Mirror fills up its outside with THE FREE PRESS reporter's well-written sketch of the enterprise of that paper in securing an early copy of the message, even before it was read at the Capitol. Would it not have been more sensible for the Mirror to have displayed a little more enterprise and published the message itself!

To which the Free Press replied:

Certainly not. The <u>Mirror</u> showed decided good taste in the selection of its <u>matter</u>. More persons have read the reporter's account of his trip from Lansing to Jackson than have read the message of the governor. It was better written and attracted far more attention than did the executive document.<sup>7</sup>

Even allowing for a considerable amount of professional chauvinism, this was high praise for Lewis. No one recalled Lewis's comment about the list of notaries and pointed out that since the message was in type even before it was delivered, the governor might have changed some of it at the last minute.

<sup>7</sup>Detroit Free Press, Jan. 17, 1871, p. 2.

As late as January 29 the <u>Free Press</u> quoted the <u>Pontiac Bill Poster</u>, which complimented the paper and Lewis and said his story was "having a big run through the papers of this State."

About this same time Lewis visited the state prison at Jackson, the asylum for the deaf, mute and blind at Flint, and the insane asylum at Kalamazoo. A legislative committee also visited these same institutions and it isn't clear from Lewis's stories if he went along with the committee or made the visits by himself. From the tone of the stories, however, it appears that he made the visits privately. At any rate, he wrote a long story on each institution; the stories appeared in the <a href="#Free Press">Free Press</a> on February 1, 4 and 5. There was little or no humor in the stories, but they were well written and they brought Lewis some more state-wide acclaim.

One of the characteristics of the series was that

Lewis was specific and anecdotal in his writing. In the

prison story, he described in detail some of the prisoners,

the cells, the shops. He even visited with a few of the

prisoners from the Detroit area. In his story on the Flint

asylum he showed a remarkable flair for stirring the emotions

of his readers. The story began:

Shut your eyes, and then try to grope your way across the room or along the street. Stop your ears and then see what a feeling comes over you--a feeling that you have been transferred to another sphere, shut in from the world by a wall so thick that no sound can penetrate. Think for a moment that you are never to speak again,

and see what the sensation is at heart. And now let me tell you of these children, the poor unfortunate ones at Flint, who grope about in darkness, shut in from God's sunshine, who have not the power of speech and hearing. 8

In the account of the insane asylum, Lewis avoided what must have been an obvious impulse for a writer such as himself; he did not write about the odd characters that he saw there. When he referred to a few of the inmates he wrote about them tenderly. "Some of the readers will feel a disappointment when they have ended the article," he wrote, "and not found a word about raving maniacs, dark dungeons, ferocious keepers, clanking chains and blood-curdling groans." He said that unfortunately there were places where such things could be seen and heard but that they were "beyond the pale of humanity, and the newer and better method [was] fast rooting out the old."

Lewis's series on the state institutions drew even heartier praise from other newspapers than had the locomotive story. On February 12 the <u>Free Press</u> once again quoted the Pontiac Bill Poster:

"Quad," of THE FREE PRESS, made over twelve columns in writing up the State Institutions last week, while the other Detroit dailies had less than six. Besides, his letters were full of anecdotes, adventures and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup>Ibid., Feb. 4, 1871, p. 1.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup>Ibid., Feb. 5, 1871, p. 3.

matters that could not fail to interest every resident of Michigan. This is the only time we ever saw the institutions fully written up, and is another proof that THE FREE PRESS is bound to maintain the inside  ${\rm track.}^{10}$ 

The next Sunday, February 19, six other newspapers were quoted each praising the series. "His reports are so interesting, and so different from the usual style of 'doing' such things," said the <u>Lansing Herald</u>, "that no person can fail to appreciate them." The <u>Owosso Press</u> called the stories "highly entertaining" and referred to Lewis as "the indefatigable 'Quad'." 11

Lewis had come a long distance in a short time. In mid-February, 1869, a fellow journalist had called him a "jackass" in print; almost exactly two years later he was receiving state-wide commendations for his work. He was not yet a figure of national prominence, not yet "the most quoted American humorist." But he was on his way.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., Feb. 12, 1871, p. 2.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup>Ibid., Feb. 19, 1871, p. 2.

## **EPILOGUE**

Lewis's writings, nor to attempt to find any cause and effect relationship between his work as a legislative correspondent and his later work as a humorist. The sole intent has been to answer a simple question: how did a man who was to become internationally known as a humorist approach the business of writing legislative news? If, in the process of attempting to answer that question, any additional insight has been given into the more academic area of the development of attitudes and style, such insight is of secondary rather than primary importance.

If the man who was M. Quad is worthy of further study (and it is the opinion of this writer that he is) the job will not be an easy task. Unless lewis's personal papers are found or additional biographical material is discovered, any study will have to be limited to Lewis's writings. A significant portion of the writings can be found only in the newspapers and magazines in which they originally appeared. It is doubtful that any truly complete bibliography of Lewis's work could be compiled, even if the writings in newspapers were not considered. Much research

was required to assemble the brief and incomplete bibliography appended to this study and no attempt was made to locate and identify articles by Lewis in magazines.

Scholars may question whether one newspaper humorist such as Charles Bertrand Lewis is worthy of their time, yet many studies have been made of other humorists contemporary with Lewis who, while better known to modern readers, were, in their time, no more popular than he. For the regionalist interested in Michigan history, Lewis is a significant figure.

When he was reporting on the legislative excursion of 1869, Lewis said that members of the press accompanied the legislators on the trip because "what would an excursion be without the 'chief' along to 'tak' the notes?" For the student of nineteenth century newspaper humor, it is unfortunate that Lewis did not have his own "chief"—a Boswell to accompany him along his career and "'tak' the notes."

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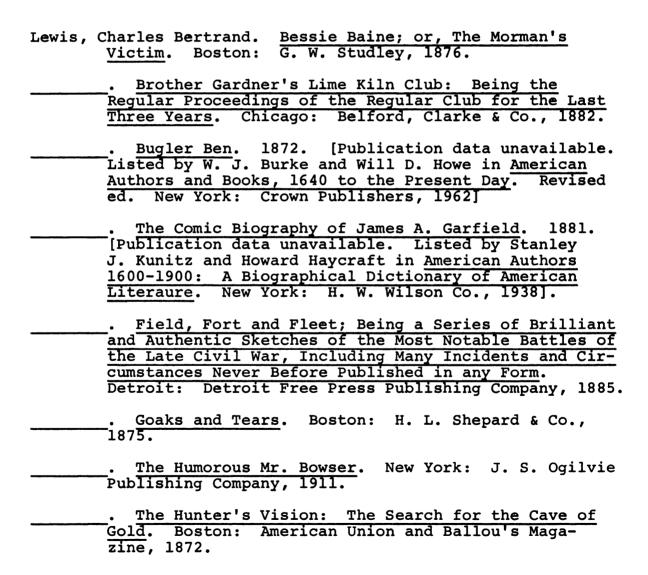
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Bijah. 1880.

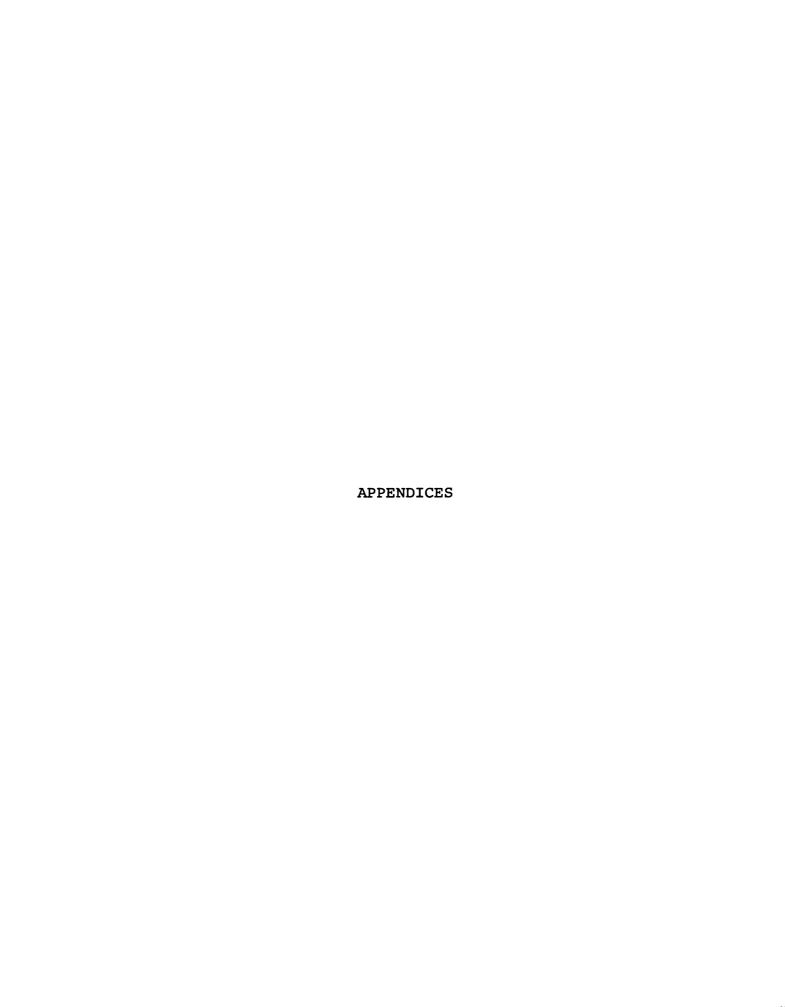
Brother Gardner and His Lime-Kiln Club. 1882.

Deacon Jackson. 1879.

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Tennessee. 1898.

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#### APPENDIX A

# "The Easy Man"

They have an "easy man" in the House. Nothing ever disturbs him. He sleeps most of the time, except when there is a motion to adjourn. This is the only subject he ever votes on, being probably convinced that his constituents cannot haul him over the coals for desiring to stretch his limbs by a walk around the city. The spiciest debate does not excite him. He looks at the combatants through half closed eyes, and mentally calculates on which side victory will rest. He don't answer to his name at roll call; he simply gives his head a side inclination, just as if he was replying to a deserved compliment. When the House goes into "committee of the whole," the "easy man" goes into a sleeping committee of one. He don't sleep very sound, however, for as the hands on the clock point to twelve, he gets uneasy, opens his eyes, rises to his feet, and very deliberately says, "Mr. Speaker, I move this House do now adjourn." If informed that his motion is "not in order," he falls back into his cane-seat like a bag of sand, satisfied that he has done his best to benefit his fellow men. I often see my

"easy man" wending his way toward the skating park, but he only goes there to look on--its [sic] out of his line to skate.

Detroit Free Press, January 19, 1869, p. 1.

## APPENDIX B

## UNTITLED

There is one thing which would have escaped my notice entirely, had not an individual walked into my sanctum yesterday to demand why these things are thus. After much coughing and stamping in the hall, the door opened, the face of an African looked in, smiled, winked, and to my nod of encouragement, the <u>corpus</u> of a noble colored man squoze its way in.

"Wall, boss?"

"Well."

"You're de FREE PRESS feller, hain't ye?"

"Yes."

"Wall, you see as how my name's Thormus Jackson Haynes."

"Yes."

"And as how I've been a-tryin' to git offis up dar, an' can't do it."

"Yes."

"And as how I want ye to come down on dat legislashush body for dere way of fooling de niggers; I tried to
git fireman, an' doorkeeper, an' cloak room, an' porter, an'
postmaster, an' any other little offiss dat war being rushed
for, but I didn't git noffin!"

"So-h-h?"

"Dat am de hebbenly truth. Dey said dat de thing war all right--dat I war jess de feller for de position, but--but whar am my offiss--whar am I now?"

Yes, "whar am he," the negro, the "amendment," the gentleman who, as a politician, overturned well laid political plans in many a town last fall? Not a one of them has received an office. Not one of them has been recognized as capable of filling the least of the positions in the gift of House and Senate. They are out of the "ring" entirely, out in the cold, and there isn't even anyone to feel bad about it—except myself. I got up and went over to where "Thormus" stood, patted his bowed head, and I promised him that he should have his name and his grievance published to the world, and that I would use my influence to get him prominently before the first Democratic Legislature that convened. At which we shook hands, and he went away more cheerfully disposed.

Detroit Free Press, January 11, 1871, p. 1.

## APPENDIX C

## An Oversight

For some cause or other, the electors of Michigan failed to send a Revels here, or to give this body a Rainy look. How the oversight occurred is none of my business, but the failure was the cause of a little merriment around the bar of the hall yesterday. A very smooth tongued and well dressed negro, loaded down with "glittering generalities," i.e., brass chains, watches and rings, walked up the hall, pulled open the door, and, as he was confronted by the Sergeant-at-Arms, politely requested:

"If you please, sah, you may take my cawd to one of the colored Representatives."

"Aren't you a little ahead of the times?" inquired the Sergeant; "there isn't any such combination of circumstances here as you refer to."

"Sah!" said the colored progressionist, straightening up until he looked like a column; "sah, did I understand you correctly? Upon being told that he did, he took his watch chain, his watch, his brass rings and his body out through the doorway and upon the steps, having no desire to witness the legislation not now thought complete without the presence of the tinted element.

Detroit Free Press, February 16, 1871, p. 1.

## APPENDIX D

## LO! THE POOR INDIAN

The other day, in scanning the lobby to see what I could pick up, I ran across the face and form of an old Indian. He sat bolt upright on his seat, had his mouth puckered up in a stoical way, brass ear-rings on, moccasins, leggings, leather strap and the like, just as if he had stepped off the war path to hear a little discussion. I was much pleased to find my "item." I sat down near him, let my eyes range over him, and reflected, "Here is a relic of years ago. Where this House now stands this noble red man may have chased the wild roebuck, or pitched his tent and reveled in the summer shades. The tread of the mighty hunter disturbed his reveries, and the change commenced. Where once was forest, now is busy life. Where the deer gamboled, the grocery clerk now draws kerosene and molasses. This Indian sees it all, and, does the retrospective view make him weep? Ah! it does. See, he raises his hand to his face to wipe away the falling tear---!"

I thought he was going to, but he didn't. He simply raised his hand to his mouth and took a huge chew of tobacco. He had just got to squirting the juice around in a lively

manner, utterly regardless of the ten cents worth of "shine" on my boots, when the sergeant-at-arms grabbed him, jaculated: "See here, Jim Ferguson, you want to get right out of here!" and the old gentleman skipped out in a brisk manner. Poor old Lo! They wouldn't even let him listen to the voices of the white men on the spot where his wigwam smoke had curled to heaven.

--Detroit Free Press, January 22, 1871, p. 1.

## APPENDIX E

## GOV. BALDWIN'S FIRST PARDON

In 1867, one Joseph Bement, of Kent county, was tried and convicted of the crime of forgery, and sentenced to the State's Prison for the term of five years. For a week past I have noticed an elderly man, locks tinged with that peculiar gray which denotes that mental grief had hastened the mark of time, eyes downcast, countenance ridged with those heavy wrinkles and furrows that burdens of care and sorrow, more than age, place there, loitering about the halls, stealing softly into and out of the Governor's room, and I have wondered what crooked path he would have straightened, by legislative favor and enactment. Yesterday the object of his visit was revealed. He was the father of Joseph Bement. His son was slowly dying of that fatal disease, consumption. An inmate of a felon's cell, a viper at his vitals, cast out by all but his kindred, he felt that he must go home to die.

A father's love reveals itself in action, not words. He saw the Governor; he appealed to him; he pleaded extenuation; his boy must die not in a felon's cell, but in the old homestead—in the arms of those who could not break

their love. The father went from here to-day with that in his eyes which never wells up until hope long deferred has suddenly and unexpectedly returned to crown a soulwrought effort made by a strong man. He had that with him to open the prison door at Jackson to his son.

--Detroit Free Press, March 5, 1869, p. 1.

## APPENDIX F

## MY RURAL FRIEND

I had a friend here from Gratiot county for about a week, but he's gone now. He came down to have a brief look at the "Legislaychure." He'd "hern tell," but had never "seen 'em" before. He was dreadful familiar; used to borrow my postage stamps, pick his teeth with the point of my "faber," and go into my drawer whenever it suited him. He was very enthusiastic the other day, when two counties had a slight "onpleasantness." My friend, who was in the lobby, attempted to slap his knees and cry out "bully!" but the Sergeant-at-Arms gave him such a look that he adjourned his demonstration quite shortly. Unknown to me, one night, he went into a sharper's room to have a little combat with that teeth-cutting animal called the "tiger." I don't know how much he won; I guess not much, for the next morning I saw him going north, satchel over his shoulder, with a stick passed through the handles, and he didn't exactly have the look of one going to buy fine land to sell again on long time.

--Detroit Free Press, January 19, 1869, p. 1.

## APPENDIX G

## [UNTITLED]

[This sketch began in the middle of a paragraph concerning a debate over a contested House seat.]

About half-past nine in the morning there was a stir of surprise at the door, and in walked a tall man with a soldier's overcoat on, followed by a little bit of a woman, as angular as a rail, dressed in light costume, and after her came a big girl, a big boy, a small girl, a small boy, and two more small boys. The sergeant had a hard time to find them a seat together, and did not succeed until the man had sat down on a plug hat, and the boys had had a struggle to secure a big apple core lying under a table. The group excited much attention, as the man kept pointing around, and asking his wife to "see thar," and every ten minutes, got up and walked to a spitoon ten feet away. At noon, the group still sat, and I found them there when I came back from dinner. At six o'clock most of the children were asleep, the woman was nodding, but they were there, the man as lively as a bug, and extraordinarily interested in the arguments. When a member made a good hit, the man slapped his leg like the kick of a mule, and would have

made a speech if it hadn't been for the sergeant. At eight o'clock, when the case was decided, I ran across the family in the hall, the father carrying two of the children, the wife another, and the big girl fighting the big boy to get him along.

"Hello!" says I, "did the result suit you?"

"Wall, can't say," replied the man, brightening up,
"because I didn't exactly get to know what they were talking
about. But I was bound to see 'er through, if it took till
daylight."

--Detroit Free Press, January 29, 1871, p. 1.

## APPENDIX H

## WASHINGTON'S BIRTHDAY

Yesterday was the anniversary of the birth of George Washington, an individual somewhat known to history, but the fact did not create any excitement in this body, or around the city. The Senate, after having the fact announced to it, took a recess for two hours more than usual, and the House for one extra hour, being an aggregate of three extra hours, in memorium of an individual who wouldn't be thought of any great account if living in these days of degenerate Radicalism. The <a href="Democrat">Democrat</a> printing office hung out a flag, some of the boarding houses had an extra amount of spring chicken, young America slid down hill, and an attempt to fire an anvil failed for want of funds to buy powder.

--Detroit Free Press, February 24, 1871, p. 1.

## APPENDIX I

## SMALL FRUITS

Certain persons in Branch County, who evidently like a dish of berries and cream, have petitioned this body to so amend the cranberry bill as to insure protection for blackberries and whortleberries. It is desired to amend the act so as to punish persons trespassing upon private "patches," and to prevent the wholesale destruction of bushes by bands of pickers. A few rattlesnakes judiciously distributed about a whortleberry marsh would no doubt go a long way toward perfecting the object of the petitioners, but the idea does not seem to have occurred to them.

--Detroit Free Press, January 29, 1871, p. 1.

## APPENDIX J

## [UNTITLED]

A day or two ago, one of the members, who had been three weeks getting himself up for a grand effort on the measure to organize a new county, kicked the quilts off as he slept, or in some other way reaped one of the richest colds in the head that has been seen during the session.

He felt his position keenly, but his nose refused to recede from its condition, and he sat and wiped away his tears and saw the bill come up. He determined to make an effort, nose or no nose, and arose and commenced:

"BISTER SPEAKER--I wandt to say a wordt odt that bill. Idt seems to be thadt idts brovisions are udjust idt a 'ighly glaring sense, adt--"

But every one laughed so heartily that the member sat down to recommence the attack on his nose, and the bill went against him.

--Detroit Free Press, March 19, 1871, p. 6.

## APPENDIX K

#### "THE TABLE"

Yesterday, one of the members, through the medium of a waggish friend, was introduced to a visitor from out of town, who straightway opened his battery by saying that he had a favor to ask. He was told to say on, and informed the member that he had a strong desire to see "the table."

"I can't read more than ten lines without coming across something, which was laid on the table," said he, "and I want to see what sort of a thing it is."

The member led him into the firemen's room, where all the pasting and wrapping is done, and pointed out a long table, which happened just then to be covered with bills. "So, that's her, is it?" remarked the man, and he felt of the legs, lifted at the ends, and added that "he knew it wasn't no common table that was referred to in the papers." He was further gratified by being informed that the table was the one used by George Washington at the time he couldn't tell a lie, and was captured by the British when Detroit surrendered.

"Gaul!" he ejaculated, "it's worth more'n two shillings to see her!"

<sup>--</sup>Detroit Free Press, March 19, 1871, p. 6.

## APPENDIX L

## A MILE A MINUTE

I never see a puffing, speeding locomotive, terrible in power, gentle as a lamb under the hand of the driver--I never see an operator at his work sending the lightning flashes over hill and valley--without feeling a stronger hate than before for the men who sneered at Franklin, calling him "a poor old crazy man," for the men who insulted the genius of Morse, calling him an idiot, for the men who laughed at Fulton when he told them that he could make a steamboat which would travel four miles an hour.

I tested both telegraph and steam the other day, and the trial served only to increase my respect for them and for the men who hourly hold them subservient to the will. Two years ago, the Governor had his message in type before coming to Lansing at the opening of the session, and he left copies at Detroit where the newspapers could get them when a telegram from Lansing should say that it was being delivered before the two Houses. This session the Governor failed to do this, and so the daily papers must get it as best they could.

At three o'clock Wednesday afternoon, Mr. Frank
Russell, Private Secretary of the Governor, placed a copy of

the message in the hands of the three correspondents of the Detroit dailies, with a wish that they might get it into Detroit in time for the morning issue.

To the telegraph office:

"Will make ten thousand words or more," says the operator, "and will take ten hours to telegraph." Ten hours is a long time, when a score of compositors are waiting for a "rush" on a seven column message, and I am going to beat the telegraph, speedy as it is.

Half a mile to the depot.

The locomotive "Northward," a new engine, stands on the track, having just arrived with the "mixed" train.

"Agent, can I hire this engine to run me to Jackson in time to connect with the 'four-thirty' Michigan Central fast express East?"

"Hire an engine! Don't you want to hire two or three national banks besides?" replies the agent, laughing.

"I am in earnest. I'm going to catch that fast express if money will do it. Ask the Superintendent what he will let the 'Northward' for the trip."

Click! click! click!

The current flashed over the wires to Jackson, bearing the following:

MR. WATSON--Reporter FREE PRESS wants to know if he can hire locomotive Northward to run him to Jackson in time to connect with 4:30 express train east. He wants to send in Governor's message.

"OPERATOR"

Click! click! and in two minutes the answer came back.

Tell reporter FREE PRESS he can hire engine for the trip. Tell engineer to get him here in time, if steam will do it.

## A. WATSON

"Here, Tom, read that," says the agent to the engineer, and in two minutes more we are off. Thirty-seven miles, and fifty-five minutes to go in, and section men, wood train, mail train, and the Valley Road trains to look out for.

Whish! rush! scream! and we go ahead. The "Northward" is pointed southward, and I am on the fireman's seat, holding on for dear life. "Hank," the fireman, keeps the bell going each moment. Conductor Doremus climbs up beside me. "Tom" holds the "throttle" with an iron hand, and we are racing to beat the telegraph.

If ever I am rich, I want some artist to paint me a picture. I want none of your landscapes, with meek cows and meeker calves standing on a river's brink--nor a boating party, nor a market scene, nor a ship under sail, with the sun going down off her port quarter. I want the picture to represent the interior of a locomotive cab, the fireman throwing wood into the red mouth waiting to consume it, with the engineer peering forward like a sentry on picket, hand on the lever that shuts off, or gives more steam, his clothing torn and greasy, his face and hands grimy with sweat and dust, but an honest noble face, not stained with liquor, and eyes so bright and fearless that any lass would think them a prize.

Whoop! rush! scream!

Delhi Station goes by us just like a cannon shot, leaving a wondering crowd on the platform, who only caught a glimpse of us to lose it in a second. There's a curve ahead, and Tom lets the whistle scream. On, on, and we catch sight of half a dozen men, who just get the hand car off the track in time. But for that whistle we should have caught them on the cow-catcher. They raise their hats and cheer, but the rush and roar is so great that we catch no sound from their lips.

"Scream-m-m!" goes the whistle, and we rush on.

Three minutes and we are in sight of Mason. Ha! ha! see
how the wood train goes through the switch on the side track.

A minute more of delay, and we should have had a fearful collision. There's a crowd at the station, and we slack just enough to hear them yell and shout. The operator has learned what sends the "Northward" tearing along the track, and the shouting takes the sound of "Bully for that FREE PRESS feller!"

"More wood, Hank," says Tom, and the red hot door flies back, and in goes wood enough to last a family a week. Whistle! scream! ding dong! The fireman keeps the bells going, and the whistle sounds before we strike a curve. A mile in two minutes! That's pretty fast riding, my dear sir. Did you ever ride on a locomotive, especially when there was no train behind to steady its rocking motion—especially when there was ice and snow on the track, and the monster was

straining to assist a reporter in beating the telegraph?

Well, it's different from the broad, easy seat in a passenger coach, where you may fall asleep from sheer listleness [sic].

It's a series of jumps, jolts, knocks and bangs. Here's a curve. Looking ahead, you shut your eyes hard, fast, and your heart gives a great throb, for it seems that the iron monster is going to leave the track for the woods. No, it goes on, and you open your eyes and feel like one suddenly drawn back from death. Suppose our engine <a href="should">should</a> leave the track? Perhaps the train just over broke a rail, or a culvert or bridge trembled a moment after the last car passed, and then went down. Don't suppose such a thing! The bare thought chills the blood, and the heart seems to stand still.

"More wood, Hank."

The conductor asks why I hang to the seat, and is answered by my being bumped against him with force enough to throw us both down. If you were driving a wagon over a succession of rail fences, the jar and banging would be no worse.

Leslie. Here we stop. It is almost time that the mail train left Jackson, and there are too many lives now depending to run "wild" further.

"What you running this engine down here in this style for?" asks the crowd of Tom.

"THE FREE PRESS has hired her to run to Jackson to connect with fast express."

"Bully for THE FREE PRESS fellers; but you can't make it." "I'll show ye," replies Tom, and the conductor comes back with a message which says: "Run to Rives' Junction, and wait for orders." On! on! and the crooked rail fences look as straight as liberty poles. Count the corners! Why, man, you might as well try to count the hairs on a man's head by looking at him for a second! "Hoop--hoop-" says the whistle, and way down the track we see black specs moving about that look like bees. Rush! scream! catch sight of four men, laborers, who swing their hats and yell. That mile was run in less than two minutes. There's a spec on the track again. It grows larger and larger, and we rush by a traveler. He stands close to the rails, and falls backward as we go by. We think of broken bones and bloody limbs, but a look backward shows him scrambling up from the snow. He got the "wind" as we went by, and it knocked him as flat as if struck with a bludgeon.

"Wh-o-o-p-p!"

Rives' Junction, and now if the mail train bothers us much, shall have had our journey for nothing, and the telegraph will laugh at our defeat. Click! click! goes the instrument, and in half a minute comes back the order. "Tell Tom to come on with a rush. Will hold train for you." Puff, puff, and we are off. They are holding a full train to let THE FREE PRESS get the Governor's message! Hang tighter now. We ran before—we are flying now. Trees go

by looking like lead-pencils; those black threads we run over are culverts four or five feet wide; that roar that touched your ears for the fourth of a second was a bridge; the fences look like a single rail keeping pace with us.

Bang, bump, rock! I hang to the seat, shut my eyes, and leave my falling tile to the care of the men, who have ridden a mile a minute before.

We are beating the telegraph--we are running as fast as any engineer ever dares push his iron steed.

# A mile a minute!

Around curves, on level stretches, over bridges, through the woods and across meadows. Only the carrier pigeon can make this time--only the lightning flash go faster. Tom is a study. Bent forward, his keen blue eyes fixed on the rails ahead, his hand seeking gauges, cocks, levers and throttles by instinct, he looks like a stone statue, his face as unreadable as marble. None of us speak a word; all eyes are looking ahead, and the bell is clanging away as if chanting a requiem. The dial shows one hundred and twenty pounds of steam, just the figure it has kept since we left Lansing. Hank pulls open the door, looks back at the wood, but Tom shakes his head, and---

W-h-o-o-p!

That's Jackson! We have held the mail train more than ten minutes, and we are going to catch the fast express. Here we are! How the passengers shout! They have been told

the cause of delay, and have good naturedly endured it. A hundred men and women have cheerfully waited to let the "Northward" hurry a package through to the thousands of readers of THE FREE PRESS. Hip! ha! hurrah! they yell, as we go by, and the sound has hardly died away before our panting steed stops at the depot building. "Ten minutes to spare!" says Tom, and he wears as proud a smile as if he owned the "Northward," and had made fortune on a wager against time. A jump through the wondering crowd and the headlight of the locomotive drawing the fast express is seen down the track. Here she comes, and a word with the baggageman sets everything right, and THE FREE PRESS is to have the message at half-past-seven, six hours before the lightning can transmit the last words from Lansing.

Ten minutes for rest and lunch, and we go back, running with a rush, for there are trains to avoid, and we must reach Lansing before the evening mail train starts southward. No moon, no stars, the snow-flakes flying, the red glare of the fire lighting up woodland and glade, we make the return trip. A hand-shake with the good fellows who have accompanied me, and I drop off at the starting point, lame, sore, bruised, shaken, and glad to turn over my temporary proprietorship of the "Northward" to "Tom and the boys."

QUAD.

<sup>--</sup>Detroit Free Press, January 3, 1871, p. 3.

