

CHAPTER I.

There being no plays to be acted at the Red Bull, because of the plague, and the players all cast adrift for want of employment, certain of us, to wit, Jack Herring and myself, clubbed our moneys together to buy a store of dresses, painted cloths, and the like, with a cart and horse to carry them, and thus provided set forth to travel the country and turn an honest penny, in those parts where the terror of pestilence had not yet turned men's stomachs against the pleasures of life. And here, at our setting out, let me show what kind of company we were. First, then, for our master, Jack Dawson, who on no occasion was to be given a second place. He was a hale, jolly fellow, who would eat a pound of beef for his breakfast (when he could get it) and make nothing of half a gallon of ale therewith—a very masterful man, but kindly withal, and with never a line of care in his face, though turned of 50. He played our humorous parts, but he had a sweet voice was the strangest thing in the world, considering his great girth. Wife he had none, but Moll Dawson was his daughter, who was a most sprightly, merry little wench, but no miracle for beauty, being neither child nor woman at this time; surprisingly thin, as if her frame had grown out of proportion with her flesh, so that her body looked all arms and legs, and her head all month and eyes, with a great tousled mass of chestnut hair, which (off the stage) was as often as not half tumbled over her shoulder. But a quicker little baggage at mimicry (she would play any part, tles or the single Coranto never was, I do think, and as merry as a lark.

Of Red Herring I need only here say that he was the most tearing villain hereafter, and, as for my looks, the less stage, where I would play the part of a hero in one act, a lackey in the second and a Merry Andrew in the third, scraping a tune on my fiddle to fill up

the intermedios. We had designed to return to London as soon as the plague abated, unless we were favored with extraordinary good fortune, and so when we heard that the sickness was certainly past and the citizens recovering of their panic we, being by this time heartily sick of our venture, which at the best gave us but beggarly recompense, set about to retrace our steps with cheerful expectations of we there learned that a prodigious fire had burned all London down, from the Tower to Ludgate, so that were we there we should find no house to play in. This laid us flat in our hopes and set us again to our vagabond enteroured the country in a most miserable light. he roads being exceedingly foul and folks more humored of nights to drowse in their chimneys than to sit in a draft barn and witness our performances, and then about the middle of February we in a kind of desperation got back again to London, only to find that we must go forth again, the town still lying in ruins and no one disposed to any kind of amusement except in high ces, where such actors as we were

held in contempt. So we, with our hearts in our boots, as one may say, set out again to seek our fortunes on the Cambridge road, and here, with no better luck than elsewhere, for at Tottenham Cross we had the mishance to set fire to the barn wherein we were playing, by a candle falling in some loose straw, whereby we did injury to the extent of a shilling or two, for which the farmer would have us pay a pound, and Jack Dawson stoutly refusing to satisfy his demand he sends for the constable, who locks us all up in the cage that night, to take us before the magistrate in the morning. And we found to our cost that this magistrate had as little justice as mercy in his composition, for though he lent a patient ear to the farmer's case, he would not listen to Jack Dawson's argument, which was good enough, being to the effect that we had not as much as a pound among us, and that he would rather be hanged than pay it if he had, and when Red Herring (seeing the kind of Puritanical fellow he was) urged that, since the damage was not done by any design of ours, it must be regarded as a visitation of Providence, he says: "Very good. If it be the will of Providence that one should be scourged, I take it as the divine purpose that I should finish the business to scourge the other." And therewith he orders the constable to take what money we have from our pockets and clap us in the stocks till sundown for payment of the difference. So in the stocks we three poor men were stuck for

six mortal hours, which was a wicked,

cruel thing indeed, with the wind blow-ing a sort of rainy snow about our ears,

little Moll brought us a sheet for a cover, and tired not in giving us kind

words of comfort. At 5 o'clock the constable unlocked us from our vile confinement, and I do be-Dawson and his daughter Moll, Red lieve we should have fallen upon him and done him a mischief for his pains there and then but that we were all frozen as stiff as stones with sitting in the cold so long, and indeed it was some time ere we could move our limbs at all. However, with much ado, we hobbled on at the tail of our cart, all three very bitter, but especially Red Herring, who cursed horridly and as I had never heard him curse off the stage, saying he would rather have staid in London to carry bricks for the gentry than join us again in this damnable adventure, etc. And that which incensed him the more was the merriment of our Moll, who, seated on the side of the cart, could do nothing better than make sport of our discontent. But there was no malice in her easant to look at when not contraried, laughter, which, if it sprang not from sheer love of mischief, arose maybe from overflowing joy at our release.

Coming at dusk to Edmonton and for singing of ditties and could fetch a finding a fine new inn there, called the tear as readily as a laugh, and he was Bell, Jack Dawson leads the cart into also exceeding nimble at a dance, which the yard, we following without a word of demur, and after putting up our trap, into the warm parlor we go and call for supper as boldly as you please. Then, when we had eaten and drunk till we could no more, all to bed like princes. which, after a night in the cage and a day in the stocks, did seem like a very paradise. But how we were to pay for this entertainment not one of us knew, nor did we greatly care, being made quite reckless by our necessities. It was the next morning, when we met together at breakfast, that our faces betrayed some compunctions, but these did not prevent us eating prodigiously. "For," from an urchin of 10 to a crone of four-score), or a livelier at dancing of Bran-the cross the size of the state of the

ed a very honest, decent man for an innimaginable on the stage and off it the most civil spoken, honest seeing young gentleman. Nor need I trouble to give a performance that night in a cart shed very proper to our purpose, paying him half of our taking in payment of our entertainment. This did Jack, thinking from our late ill luck we should get I say about them the better. Being at the most a dozen people in the sixsomething of a scholar and a poet, I penny benches and a score standing at had nearly died of starvation, when twopence a head. But it turned out, as Jack Dawson gave me a footing on the the cunning landlord had foreseen, that our hanger was packed close to the very door, in consequence of great numbers coming to the town in the afternoon to see a bull baited, so that when Jack Dawson closed the doors and came behind the scene to dress for his part he told us he had as good as £5 in his pocket. With that to cheer us we played our tragedy of "The Broken Heart" very merrily, and after that, changing our dress in a twinkling, Jack Dawson, disguised as a wild man, and Moll, as a wood nymph, came on to the stage to dance a pastoral, while I, in the fashion of a satyr, stood on one side plying the better times. But, coming to Oxford, fiddle to their footing. Then, all being done, Jack thanks the company for their indulgence and bids 'em good night.

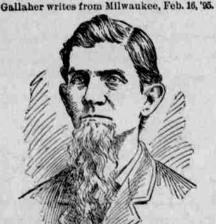
And now, before all the company are yet out of the place, and while Jack Dawson is wiping the sweat from his face, comes the landlord and asks pretty prise, and so for six months more we bluntly to be paid his share of our earn-

(To be Continued.)

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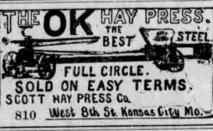
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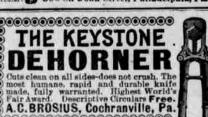
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