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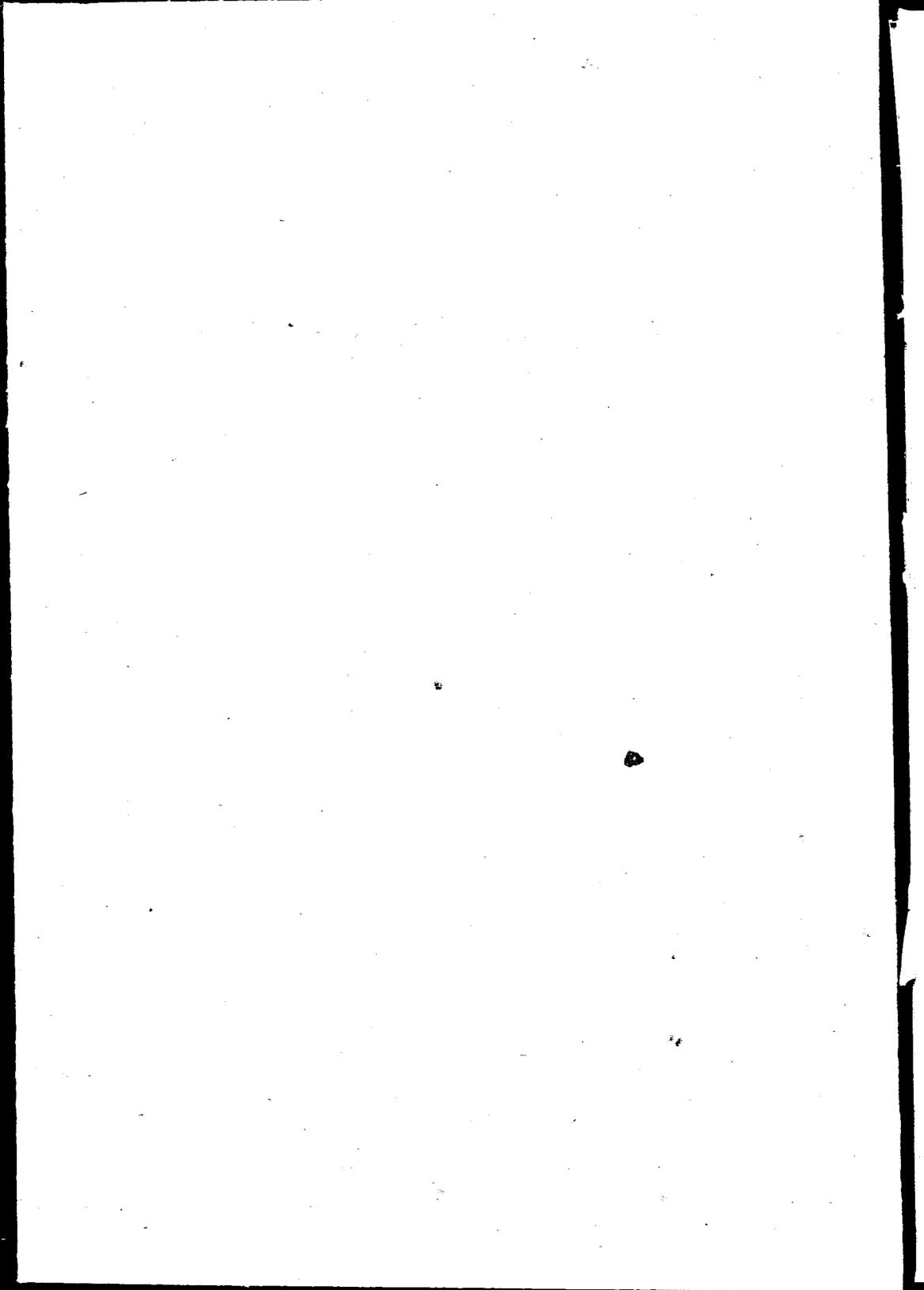
Hodgson, Sam k

"Town Hall, tonight..."

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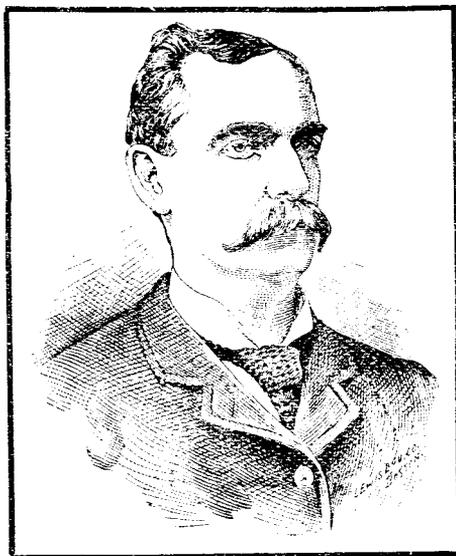


TOWN HALL, TO-NIGHT.

... OR ...

SHOW LIFE

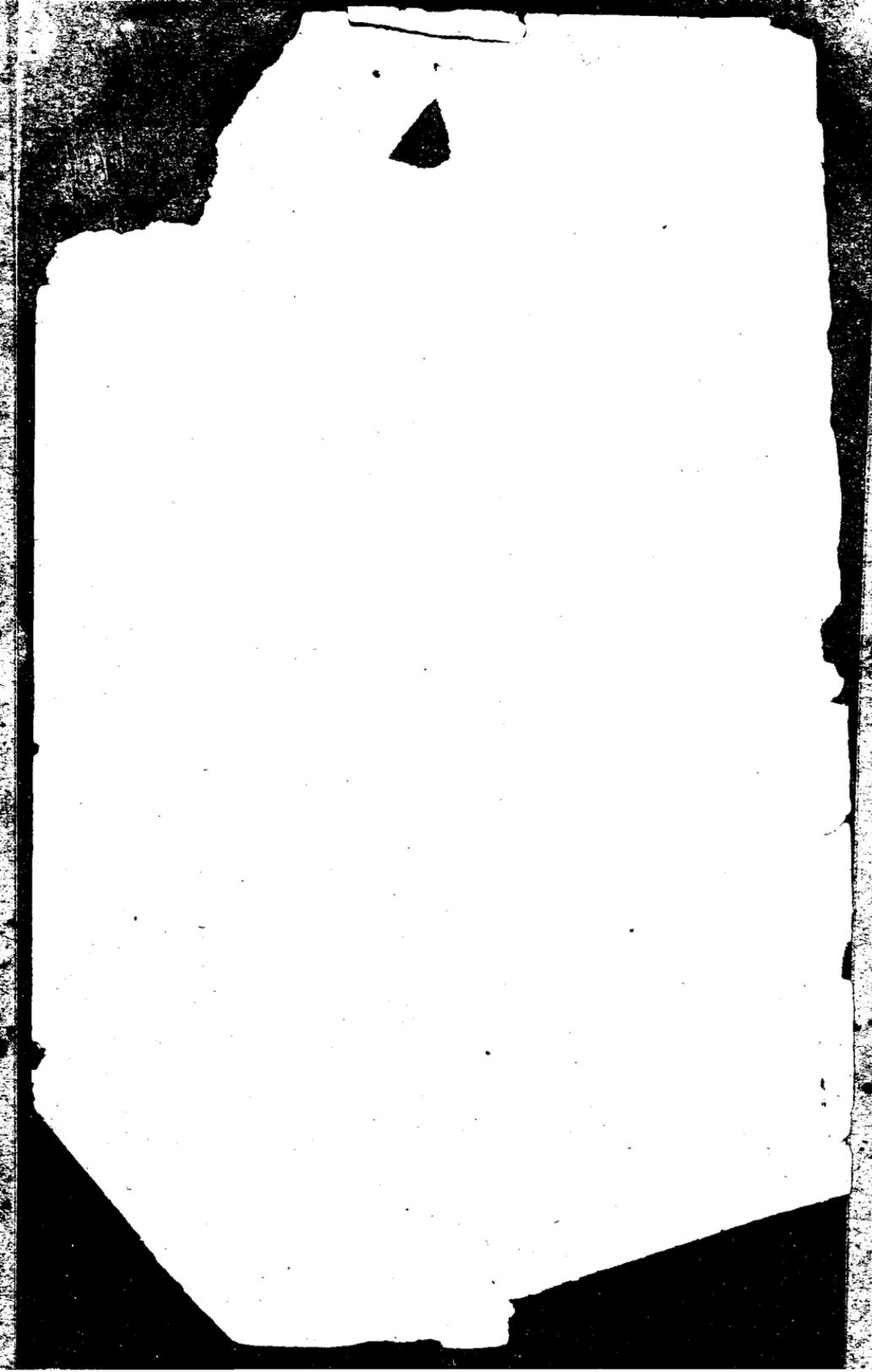
ON THE



CROSS ROADS

BY

SAM K. HODGDON



TOWN HALL, TO-NIGHT

OR

SHOW LIFE

ON THE

CROSS ROADS

THE PERSONAL REMINISCENCES OF THE AUTHOR'S TEN
YEARS' EXPERIENCE AS A PERFORMER IN THE
SMALL TOWNS OF AMERICA

BY

SAM K. HODGDON

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TO THE
Dramatic Representatives of the City Press,

WHOSE INTELLIGENT AND IMPARTIAL EFFORTS
HAVE CONTRIBUTED MORE THAN ANYTHING ELSE IN
GAINING FOR BOSTON THE REPUTATION WHICH IT ENJOYS OF
BEING THE BEST "SHOW TOWN" IN AMERICA,

This Little Booklet,

WITH ITS MANY IMPERFECTIONS, IS MOST RESPECTFULLY
INSCRIBED.

THE AUTHOR.

CHAPTER I.

IN speaking or writing, a too prolific use of the personal pronouns "I" or "we" is generally considered extremely bad form, and in the highest degree inexcusable; but as this little work partakes to a great extent of the nature of an autobiography, the constant application of those figures of speech seems a necessity, and as such I trust the reader will kindly regard them.

Exactly why it is that at an early age nine out of every ten boys experience an inordinate desire to "travel with a show," is a question which the philosopher of the future will have to wrestle with, for in our day and generation it has never been satisfactorily answered. In most cases the mania is only temporary, and ranks in the category of childhood's ills with the measles, the mumps, and the whooping-cough: like them, although very severe while it lasts, it is fortunately of short duration. Occasionally, however, the "show instinct" gets a good firm grip on a boy's vitals, and refuses to be shaken off on any pretence whatever, and in that case it happens that in the course of time a full-fledged, "salary-no-object," song and

dance man drifts out into the world, and joins that innumerable throng whose days and nights are passed in "holding the mirror up to nature," cursing the advance agent, and waiting at country stations for the next train.

My "grand *entrée*" into this world of "one-night stands" was made at Saco, Me., on the 26th day of July, 1853, and I must confess that a more inauspicious place for an embryo actor to open his eyes for the first time could not be imagined: it enjoyed at that period the honor of being the very worst show town in America; and that it was fully entitled to that distinction, I several times demonstrated in my amateur days, to the intense disgust of my paternal parent, and the total annihilation of his hard-earned finances.

My first appearance upon any stage was made at a school exhibition in my native town; but my recollections of that memorable event are exceedingly blurred and confused, and there are so many garbled accounts of the affair in circulation that it is next to an impossibility to pick out the correct one. My own impression is that I ascended the platform absolutely "dead letter perfect," but I must have made some sort of a mistake in locating the audience, for I had not spoken a dozen words when I was admonished in loud whispers from the wings, to turn my face to the people, and cordially invited by some small boys on the front seats to "get off" and "go bag myself," etc., which so "rattled" me that I lost all consciousness, and when I recovered my senses, I was standing in the dressing-room covered with confusion, decayed apples, and rheumatic eggs.

It would seem that an episode of this nature would

be sufficient to dishearten the most ambitious aspirant, but in the bright vocabulary of the stage-struck youth, there is no such word as discouragement, and I anxiously awaited another opportunity to display my histrionic abilities.

In the spring of 1871 a party of boys, of which I was one, decided that in the interests of civilization it was absolutely necessary that we give a show in Kennebunk, Me., and after much weighty deliberation three of us were selected to go over and secure the hall and make all preliminary arrangements. We accordingly engaged a horse and carriage, and at about seven o'clock, on one of the darkest nights it has ever been my fortune to witness, we started out. The distance to Kennebunk was only nine miles; but the night was so intensely dark that it was almost impossible to see the horse; and as a consequence we lost our way completely, and floundered along over the muddy roads for hours. Finally, at about three o'clock in the morning, we spied lights ahead, and with exclamations of delight and relief at having at last reached our destination we urged the tired steed forward, and in a few moments drove into — Saco. We had described a complete circle, and arrived back at the point we had started from.

Nothing daunted, however, we engaged the hall by letter, and the following week the "Olympic Burlesque Company" appeared in Mousam Hall, Kennebunk, before an audience of eleven persons, whose enjoyment of the performance was in no degree lessened by the fact that our expenses amounted to nearly fifty dollars.

CHAPTER II.

My next exploit worthy of note was an attempt to give an entertainment in the town of Alfred, Me., in which undertaking I was aided and abetted by a young man who at that time had spoiled in the neighborhood of ten barrels of elegant potatoes, in the practice of the art of juggling. Upon our arrival in the village we found a railroad in process of construction, and the performance (?) had scarcely commenced in the evening when about fifty of the worst roughs in the country entered the hall in total disregard of the trifling matter of purchasing tickets, and without any hesitation whatever proceeded to tear down our curtains, throw our wardrobe and "props" through the window, and smash things generally. I had borrowed a tall silk hat to wear on this occasion, with the object of imparting a professional tone to my appearance, and in the *mêlée* that ensued, I jammed it on my head and started to make my escape: at this juncture some fellow in the gallery threw a lighted kerosene lamp with such unerring precision, that it struck my hat fair on the crown, pressing it so tightly down over my ears that it actually had to be cut in halves before it could be removed.

My partner in this grand amusement enterprise crawled through a trap-door in the stage in an effort to find some underground exit from the building, and being unsuccessful in his search started to return: no sooner had he poked his head through the aperture

than he was met by a large over-ripe tomato, which, coming in violent contact with his eye, was reduced to a shapeless and hopeless wreck, and, mingling with the cork on his face, caused him to assume a most ghastly and frightful appearance. I am inclined to think, however, that this circumstance was the means of saving us much further trouble, for the moment the rascals caught a glimpse of him they at once concluded that they had knocked his brains out, and with the fear of the gallows uppermost in their minds they beat a hasty retreat: and we improved the opportunity to hastily pack such of the débris as we could find, and make our escape. But it is a fact susceptible of the strongest kind of proof, that in our incursions into the country thereafter, we were always very particular to avoid the town of Alfred. I hope the natives missed us, but I am harassed by doubts.

My amateur experience extended over a period of seven years, and was crowded full of thrilling episodes and disagreeable occurrences; but nothing seemed to disturb my equanimity or deter me from my purpose. As my father often remarked in those days, "the devil was in me," and no amount of reasoning or argument had any effect.

On one occasion a party of us were returning from one of our periodical fly-by-night excursions into the interior. We were travelling in one of the old-fashioned Concord coaches which were so common in New England in the palmy days before the stage lines were superseded by the railroads; we were about ten miles from home, when, in descending a very steep hill, some portion of the harness broke, and the heavily-laden

vehicle ran forward onto the horses' heels; the frightened animals immediately started at break-neck speed, and all efforts of the driver to control them were in vain. It was a moment of terrible suspense, and with blanched faces, and hearts that had almost ceased to beat, we awaited the inevitable. Finally, when near the foot of the declivity, the wheels struck an old stump by the roadside, and in an instant the air was filled with trunks, satchels, banjos, violins, and ambitious actors.

It has been claimed by some writers that Providence exercises especial care and watchfulness over the idiotic, the insane, and all those who are weak mentally, and I sometimes think that stage-struck amateurs must be included in that category, for while it would appear that nothing but a miracle could have saved us at that time from total destruction, yet we all escaped with slight bruises, and arrived home the next day in a thoroughly demoralized condition. I believe that my father has in his possession to-day a receipted bill for his share of the damages to that coach.

I was cast at one time for the character of "Wenonga," the Indian chieftain in the "Jibbenainousay;" and in the scene where "Wenonga" is killed by "Nick of the Woods," I was lying dead on the stage, when one of the trappers dropped his heavy gun to ground rest, the butt of it striking me on the side of the head, nearly tearing off my right ear and giving me a wound which kept me confined to the house for two months. But what did I care? Was I not acquiring experience?

CHAPTER III.

IN December, 1871, I received an offer to travel with a panorama of the Holy Land. Here was the long-looked-for golden opportunity. Here was the first stepping-stone which should lead me to the very top-most point of the pinnacle of fame, and, as can be readily surmised, I lost no time in accepting the situation.

I joined this "highly moral exhibition" in the city of Lewiston, Me., arriving there in the midst of a pouring rain-storm. One of the most startling features of my wearing apparel at that time was a new six-dollar overcoat, the sleeves of which were lined with some cheap red material. In wandering about in search of my employers' stopping-place, I became drenched to the skin, and the coloring matter came out of the aforesaid lining and ran down my hands in streams: in my excitement and nervousness a large portion of it was transferred to my face, and it is highly probable that I was the most ferocious and bloodthirsty appearing individual that ever paraded the streets of Lewiston.

The "Mammoth Aggregation" of which I was now a member, consisted of myself, the proprietor, and his wife; and a strict regard for the sacred name of truth compels me to say that in an amusement experience extending over nearly fifteen years, during which time I have been thrown in contact with the people of thirty different States, I have never met two people who

could in any way compare with these two worthies for downright meanness and absolutely fiendish parsimony.

My duties consisted in making myself generally useful in a vast field of versatility, such as distributing bills, setting up the panorama frame, turning the crank which rolled the "magnificent paintings" into view, and attending to such other work as their royal pleasures dictated. For this service I was to receive the very munificent sum of three dollars per week and my expenses. Not a particularly large salary, do I hear you say? Well, Heaven bless you, my children, do you suppose that salary was any object to me at that time? Perish the thought! What I most desired was experience, and experience was what I most emphatically received.

They were adepts in the art of economy, these people, and through making it a life study had attained a degree of proficiency never before equalled in the annals of history.

One of their experiments in this direction was an attempt to ascertain exactly how small a quantity of food they could furnish me with, and still sustain sufficient life in my body to enable me to perform my allotted tasks. In furtherance of this object, I was almost invariably sent to second-rate boarding-houses, while they secured for themselves the best accommodations the towns afforded. Possibly there may be people on this earth who would heartily enjoy distributing two thousand quarter-sheet descriptive bills in a blinding snowstorm, on an empty stomach, but I am free to confess that there are things in this life from which I

can derive a greater — oh! so much greater — degree of pleasure.

It was while on this tour that I made my first visit to Boston, and it has always been a matter of considerable surprise to me that the fact has never been mentioned in the chronological department of the Old Farmers' Almanac, or some other standard work, for it was most assuredly a memorable event for me.

CHAPTER IV.

It happened in this wise. We had been showing for a week in the various churches of Portland, Maine, and business having been wretchedly bad, the manager decided to "jump" to some point west of Boston. He therefore very kindly offered to grant me a three days' vacation at my home, explaining that as soon as he had determined just where he was to open, he would write me, and I could then come on. Of course, the trifling fact that by this arrangement he would save a half-week's salary, three days' board, and my railroad fare to Boston, never entered his mind, and I am sure it did not occur to me until I had accepted his proposal and it was everlastingly too late. In two days I received a note telling me to come to Quincy, Mass., and *en route* there I entered the classic precincts of the Hub for the first time in my life.

To say that I was a green, unsophisticated youth at this time, would be putting it exceeding mild, but with a confidence born of the most intense ignorance,

I determined that I would find the Old Colony railroad station, from which I was to leave for Quincy, without asking or receiving directions of any sort. With this object in view, I walked, *walked*, WALKED for hours, up one street and down another, searching for something that would guide me in the right direction, totally ignorant as to my whereabouts, but still doggedly persistent in my resolve to make no inquiries whatever.

Finally, when I had become so tired and exhausted that I could hardly stand, I spied a street-car bearing the welcome legend, "Old Colony and Albany Depots;" and with a feeling of unspeakable relief I boarded it, and sank into a seat. I rode for nearly a half-hour, with no signs of reaching my destination: my sense of self-reliance grew weaker and weaker, and at last left me altogether, and I ventured to meekly inquire of the conductor if he was going to the Old Colony depot.

"Yes," he replied. "I am going there this evening, but this is my last trip for the afternoon, and we are going to the stables now," and I slid off that car firmly convinced that nature had made a sad mistake in not bestowing upon me an extra pair of legs and two long ears.

By dint of hard search and the aid of several police officers, I at last reached the street on which the much desired station is located, and was congratulating myself that my troubles were nearly at an end, when I ran up against the old gray-haired "chestnut," bit it like a little man, and was landed high and dry.

I was accosted by a rough-looking individual with,—
"Hallo, Jim, old boy! How are you, any way?"

Heard you were in town, and have been looking all over for you."

"I think you have made a mistake," said I, "for my name is not Jim."

"Oh, you are the same old Jim, I see, always joking," was the laughing reply; "but come on, let's go in and take something."

"But really," I protested, "you are wrong. I never saw you before in my life."

"Why, ain't you Jim Henderson from Randolph?" he inquired, with a puzzled expression on his face.

"Well, hardly," I replied, considerably amused by his blunder; "my name is Sam Hodgdon, and I am from Saco, Me."

"Well, I beg ten thousand pardons!" he exclaimed, in an apologetic manner, "but I was looking for Jim in town to-day, and upon my word, you are the perfect image of him in every way. No harm done, however," and with a cheery "Good-day!" he passed up a side street.

I had gone but about two blocks, when a fine appearing young man turned the corner suddenly, and the moment he saw me, rushed up and grasped my hand with a cordial grip.

"Why, bless my soul, Sam!" he cried. "You are the last person I expected to see in Boston. What the deuce are you doing up here? where did you come from? where are you going? and how are all the folks in Saco?"

I was somewhat staggered for a moment, for I couldn't recollect ever seeing his face before, and informed him that he had decidedly the best of me.

"Why, you haven't forgotten Smithy, have you?" he asked. "George Smith, you know. Don't you remember that I went to school with you for over two years?" and with that he rattled away so volubly about the commonplace affairs of school life, in such a frank, honest manner, that I took it for granted that he must be some old forgotten schoolmate: and feeling a trifle friendless and homesick just then, I experienced a genuine sensation of relief at having met him, and in a few moments had told him my business, where I was going, and what a struggle I had had to find the depot.

"Well," said he, "this is really the funniest coincidence I ever heard of. Why, do you know, my father is a conductor on the Old Colony, and takes out the next train that stops at Quincy: and I'll just about run out there with you, and it won't cost you a cent, and we'll have a jolly good time in the bargain."

"Here's a piece of luck which compensates me for the misery of the day," thought I: for although the fare to Quincy was but a trifle, all I had in the world was a five-dollar note, and the thought that I should not be obliged to break it was extremely gratifying.

As we were passing a tobacco store my new-found acquaintance remarked, "Just wait here a moment, Sam. I lost a box of cigars on the ball game yesterday on a bet with the ticket agent at the station: I'll just step in and get them and take them down to him. I won't be long," and he disappeared in the store. He returned shortly, however, with a look of disgust on his face and a twenty-dollar note in his hand.

"That infernal Dutchman can't change a twenty."

said he; "have you got any money in your pocket that you'll let me have till we get down to the station where I can break this?"

"How much do you want?" I inquired.

"The cigars are six dollars," he replied.

"Well, I'm sorry," said I, "but I've only got five dollars."

"That'll do all right," he returned, "I'll stand him off for the other dollar." So I passed over my poor, lonesome five-dollar bill, glad that I was able to accommodate him.

Well, that settled it, of course; it was the same old story; but I did not realize that I had been duped, until, after waiting fully twenty minutes, I went into the shop and inquired for him, and was told by the proprietor that he "left by the side door long ago." I went out on the sidewalk; and what with cursing my stupidity, and grief at the loss of my entire capital, I was in a frame of mind closely bordering on insanity. What to do I did not know. Here I was in a strange city, absolutely penniless, and as helpless as an infant.

In this extremity I wandered down to the station, and found that a freight train which had just been made up was on the point of leaving. Inspired by a feeling of sheer desperation, I hunted up the conductor and frankly told him my situation, and asked him to allow me to ride free. He kindly informed me that his train did not stop at my destination, but that they were obliged to go very slow while passing through the town, and that if I was willing to take the risk of jumping off, he would allow me to take passage under the circumstances.

Just about that moment I was willing to risk anything on earth, and I gladly accepted his offer. When we reached Quincy, he pointed out a place where he thought I would be able to land safely. I stood in the door of the caboose, drew a long breath, jumped from the moving train, and dropped gracefully on my hands and face into the centre of one of the biggest mud-puddles in the birthplace of John Quincy Adams.

CHAPTER V.

THESE little incidents are related simply as illustrations of the wonderful tenacity with which a "stage-struck" youth will cling to his purpose in spite of trials, troubles, and all sorts of unforeseen tribulations.

And it is true to a certain extent of all other trades and professions. Many good and well-meaning parents lay out a course which they are desirous of having their boys follow through life, totally regardless of their natural inclinations: by the exercise of strong parental authority, they frequently succeed in accomplishing their aim. So it happens that the world is filled with very poor clergymen who would have made excellent carpenters; inexpressibly bad lawyers who should have been barbers; incompetent physicians who would have made their mark carrying the hod: and I really must confess that I have seen actors who would have appeared to much better advantage hoeing corn.

In this respect I claim that our civilization is sadly at fault. Allow a boy to follow the bent of his own

inclinations, so far as they relate to his occupation through life, and if those inclinations are wrong he will be the first to find it out; if he perseveres in the face of all sorts of opposition and discouragement, then he is only following the path laid out for him by a divine law of nature, and providing no misdirected parental interference restricts his efforts, depend upon it that sooner or later he will reach the goal for which he is striving.

But to return to our friends the panorama fiends. Among other wonderful rules promulgated for my guidance was the express order that I should never pay over fifty cents for having the baggage carted, under any circumstances; as we were carrying something like half a ton weight of the same, and considering the fact that the distance between stations and hotels varied in different towns from one mile to four, it goes without saying that the possibility of a strict observance of this rule at all times was exceedingly dubious; and it was often the cause for calling down upon my head the heartiest curses and abuse from hard-working draymen, in which they were frequently joined by the sympathizing bystanders, who did not hesitate to denounce my unparalleled meanness in the strongest terms. All this was, as can be imagined, extremely pleasant to a person with a highly sensitive temperament, and added largely to the stock of experience which I was filing away for future reference.

It so happened that one day in the city of Brockton we had occasion to have our baggage carted to Campello, a village about two miles distant. Circumstances rendered it impossible for me to consult my employers

in regard to the matter; and as it was necessary for the work to be done at once, I made a contract with the expressman for the sum of one dollar and a half. As it would occupy the greater part of the afternoon to make the trip and return, and require the employment of an extra man to assist in loading, I considered it very cheap, and distinctly recollect congratulating myself on making a remarkably close bargain. Judge of my surprise and indignation, therefore, when Saturday night came around, to find one dollar deducted from my poor miserable salary, on the plea that I had paid that amount for draying in excess of what was allowed me. A very little figuring convinced me that if this sort of thing was to continue, it would be simply a question of time until I should be paying these worthies something for the privilege of travelling with them. I grew to regard them with a sort of superstitious fear, and often caught myself exclaiming aloud, in the words of the traditional parrot, "I wonder what they are going to do next;" and I soon found out.

About a week after this event transpired, we arrived in New Bedford one evening quite late, too late in fact to obtain any supper at the hotel. Nothing was said about providing me with anything to eat, and while sitting by the office-window, tired, cold, and hungry, I had the satisfaction of seeing my lord and lady emerge from the ladies' entrance, sneak across the street and enter a brilliantly lighted restaurant opposite.

This was the last straw that dislocated the dromedary's spinal column: a feeling of utter discouragement took the place of hunger, and I went to bed that night nearer disgusted with the "slow business" and all

appertaining to it than I ever was before or ever have been since. It must be remembered that I was a young, verdant boy, who had never been away from home before; who had always been used to the watchful care and protection of loving and indulgent parents; and the petty meanness of the act affected me much more forcibly than many a greater case of injustice has in later years; so much so in fact that it is indelibly impressed upon my mind even at this day.

The next morning I drew what little money was due me, explaining that I wished to make a purchase: and bidding good-by to the Holy Land, to Joseph and his brethren, and the Sea of Galilee, I boarded the first train east, and silently stole away.

I have been informed that the highly religious pirate who conducted this strictly moral "snap" has since passed away and been gathered to his fathers; and although I dislike to speak ill of the dead, I must say that if this is a fact, his aforesaid fathers are deserving of the sympathy of the entire community. And if the "she-devil" who aided, abetted, and prompted her partner in many of the disreputable and dirty acts of those two months, still encumbers the earth with her miserable presence, I would like to have her drop me a few lines, and say if the language I have used is in any way too harsh.

CHAPTER VI.

I SOON recovered from my despondency, however, and entered into amateur theatricals with renewed zeal, occupying all my spare moments in writing letters to all parts of the country soliciting engagements: and I will here take occasion to say, that if any manager living to-day, who was doing business between the years 1871 and 1877, either located or on the road, can look over his files of old correspondence and not find one or more letters from me, he is entitled to my humblest apology, for it was most certainly not my intention to overlook any one.

My efforts, though, seemed to be productive of nothing but ignominious failure, and the nearest I ever came to securing an engagement was in the spring of 1872, I believe. I had written to A. W. Purcell, who was engaged at that time in organizing a company at Rockland, Me., to play under the auspices of Grand Army posts. He kindly favored me with a reply, stating that his company was entirely filled, but informed me that the veteran J. C. Myers would shortly appear in my town with his combination, and advised me to call on him, and he, perhaps, would be able to do something for me.

Here was a ray of encouragement, to say the least, and for the next two weeks I built some of the most magnificent air-castles imaginable. In fancy I saw my name emblazoned on posters in letters three feet high; I thought of the thousands of people who would soon

awake to the fact that a new comedy star had risen in the theatrical firmament, and I could almost hear the deafening plaudits with which delighted multitudes signified their appreciation of my intensely funny impersonations. Poor fools that we mortals are! What a blessed dispensation of Providence that the future is clothed in impenetrable darkness, for life without hope would be a great deal like chicken-pie without the chicken.

On the day of the company's arrival I dressed myself with scrupulous care, and started out, explaining in a somewhat grandiloquent manner to several friends whom I met, that I had been sent for in regard to an engagement, leaving them to infer that my services were in great demand. As I approached the hotel I saw the burly form of the manager (I recognized him at once from his lithographs) standing on the front steps. Any one who ever knew the late J. C. Myers will be able to testify that, although a perfect gentleman, and a kind-hearted man in every respect, he certainly presented a most formidable appearance. Extremely stout, with a very severe cast of countenance, made doubly forbidding by a pock-marked face, he was a personage whose physical aspect was well calculated to inspire terror in the breast of a simple-minded country youth.

The moment I saw him, my courage suddenly evaporated, leaving me as weak and as limp as a rag: the cold perspiration stood out on my face in great beads, and, thinking to regain my self-possession, I decided to postpone the interview for a few moments, and walked on up the street. In the course of a half-hour, I flat-

tered myself that I had recovered my presence of mind, and retraced my steps; but as soon as I approached the hotel, the same feeling of diffidence and fear overcame me, and again I walked past without any attempt to carry out my purpose.

This was repeated a dozen times during the afternoon, and at dusk I sneaked home heartily ashamed of myself, and thoroughly resolved to be more successful the next day. But it was all in vain; and although a person who has never experienced the tortures of chronic bashfulness will find it difficult to believe the statement, it is nevertheless a positive fact, that that company remained in town one entire week, during which time I haunted the front of their hotel daily, yet I never could muster up sufficient courage to ask the desired question, and they departed for their next stand, leaving me torn and lacerated by a thousand conflicting emotions, the principal one being a feeling of deep regret that the great public should be deprived of such a brilliant luminary.

CHAPTER VII.

TIME passed on, and the list of managers to whom I had not written was growing smaller day by day; in fact, I had begun to contemplate the advisability of going over the entire professional directory a second time, when in the summer of 1877, in answer to a letter addressed to the proprietor of a concert company then well known in the New England States, I received a

reply to the effect that he was somewhat pleased with the tone of my letter, and might possibly be induced to give me an opening for the next regular season.

This was followed in a few days by a request that I come to Boston and appear with his company in Tremont Temple on the Fourth of July, which would give him an opportunity to see exactly what I could do. Of course the mere thought of making my first professional appearance in Boston was enough to nearly frighten me out of my senses, but I determined that it was then or never, and I went. I was fortunate enough to give my employer satisfaction, and was at once engaged for the season of 1877, and on the twentieth day of August of that year began my professional career in the town of Barnstable, Mass.

I have often wished that I had had a photograph taken on the eventful morning that I joined this party, for in this era of dime museums it would certainly have commanded a good price. I was a long, lean, lank country boy, attired in a brand-new suit of store clothes from which the wrinkles most stubbornly refused to be banished; and to complete my outfit, I had purchased one of those old-fashioned black shiny valises, on which I had had painted in large white letters my initials and the word "Hotel."

We arrived at our first stand about noon, just in season for dinner, but upon entering the dining-room I found that I was entirely too nervous and excited to eat, and after dallying with my food for a few minutes, and attracting the amused attention of the guests, I gave it up and attempted to get out; but in rising, my knees came in contact with the table, upsetting a half-

dozen coffee cups, and spilling the contents into the laps of their respective owners; thoroughly demoralized I made a break for the door, which I closed just in time to escape a large biscuit which was aimed at my head by a "fresh" young commercial man.

This little incident did not of course tend to increase my peace of mind to any great extent, and as a consequence my work on the stage that night went very badly indeed; I was ashamed to enter the dining-room again, and, taking it all in all, a more wretched and miserable person did not exist. The company were very kind, however, and made light of the whole affair, and in a few days I had gained considerable confidence and gradually grew somewhat accustomed to my new position.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE season with this party was not a particularly eventful one, for they had travelled the same section of country for years, and had but little to do except to follow the routine of former visits; still there was no lack of trifling incidents to relieve the monotony, and the time passed quickly and pleasantly.

I recollect one little occurrence, which, although very disagreeable and uncomfortable at the time, furnished us with considerable amusement in recalling it afterward.

There is a town in the western part of Massachusetts, the name of which I have forgotten, containing within its limits four small villages, situated some dis-

tance apart from each other and known respectively as the North, South, East and West villages; for the convenience of all the citizens their town hall had been built in a large grove in a central location about three miles from each settlement.

The night on which we played there was exceedingly dark and stormy, and the result was an extremely light house. We finished the entertainment about ten o'clock, but it was nearly eleven before we had finished packing, and were ready to take the bus which was to carry us back to the hotel.

We noticed that our driver was somewhat intoxicated, but thought nothing of it particularly, until we had ridden about three-quarters of an hour, when, thinking that we must be somewhere near the village, we opened a window, and inquired how much farther it was.

"Only a little way," he replied with a hiccup, and we rode on for a half-hour longer, when, becoming convinced that something was wrong, the manager ordered the Jehu to stop, and got out to investigate. He found that we were in a thick forest, traversed by one of those rough, narrow roads such as are used only by lumbermen in hauling logs from the woods in the winter season.

The rain was falling heavily, the night was intensely dark, and the ladies were hysterical with fright; a nice predicament for a show company; and to make matters worse, the driver was so drunk that at first he was unable to give any idea as to his whereabouts. A sound berating, however, sobered him up a trifle, and he acknowledged that he had lost his way, but thought he should be able to find it again in a short time.

Accordingly a member of the troupe mounted the box with him, and through the long dreary hours of that miserable night we rode on, tired, cold, and wet to the skin by the rain beating in through the crevices and windows of the rickety old vehicle, which, to add to our discomfort, was continually threatened with total destruction, from running over stumps or sinking to the hubs in some miry ditch.

Finally, just before daylight we emerged from the woods and came out on a country road, and peering through the darkness for some sign of civilization, I distinguished the dim outlines of a guide-board. I have had occasion several times in my life to most bitterly curse those mastodonic monarchs of falsehood and deceit, but at this time I was glad to welcome it as a friend and brother. It was but the work of a moment to "shin" the post, and lighting a match, I held it aloft, and became possessed of the cheering information that it was twenty-one and a half miles to our town.

Never did the English language seem so barren and scant as it did on that chilly October morning, for ten of us were unable to find enough of it to express our opinion of the festive knight of the whip. He bore our abuse like a stoic, however, and made the best possible time to the village, which we reached about nine o'clock in the forenoon, just as a party was being organized to go out and search for us.

A few weeks later, we opened in Manchester, N. H., and were greeted by an audience which packed the large opera-house from footlights to entrance. The people were very enthusiastic, and the show was going

splendidly. The principal number on our programme was a harp solo performance by the wife of the manager, and she had just finished one of those wonderful selections which have made her name famous throughout the country, and in response to a tremendous encore was giving her celebrated imitation of a music-box.

In the midst of a pianissimo passage, where the touch on the strings was so light as to scarcely make any vibration whatever, and while the vast audience was listening breathlessly to catch the faint, sweet notes, a young man in the gallery suddenly jumped to his feet, and, grasping his right leg with both hands, began to dance wildly in between and over the tops of the seats, yelling frantically all the while, "Come and get him! Come and get him! Murder! Fire! Police!" etc.

In an instant the whole house was in an uproar. Women screamed and fainted; men pushed and fought in an endeavor to get their wives and children to the exit, and the occupants of the gallery rushed pell-mell down the stairs, under the impression that an escaped lunatic was among them; the man all the while still retaining a firm grasp upon his leg, and prancing around, shrieking at the top of his voice.

At last when it was ascertained that the building was not on fire, and that there was no imminent danger, several gentlemen approached him, and endeavored to find out the cause of the trouble; but his answers were so incoherent and unintelligible that they decided that it was really a case of insanity, and seizing him they conducted him to an ante-room, where upon investigation it was found that a large rat had run up his

trousers-leg. Thoroughly demoralized with fright, he had grabbed the rodent just as it reached his knee, and not knowing what it was, and being of a very nervous temperament, he had lost his senses completely, and had he not been relieved just when he was, would in all probability have had convulsions.

The audience were apprised from the stage of the nature of the trouble, and the entertainment proceeded amid occasional outbursts of hearty laughter at this, funny, and I believe entirely unparalleled incident.

CHAPTER IX.

THE small back-country towns of New England are extremely difficult places to show in, from the fact that the majority of them have no halls properly fitted for the amusement business, so that the poor showman has to make shift with schoolhouses, court-rooms, churches, and any large room that can possibly be made suitable for the occasion. A large amount of work is required to get these places into anything like a presentable shape, for they are almost invariably destitute of any conveniences whatever; still there is a redeeming feature in the fact that the hard labor is always offset by the sure good business which follows, for in this class of towns shows are few and far between, and when one does stray along the natives are hungry for it.

It was in one of this sort of halls in a small New Hampshire village, that we found ourselves one afternoon at about three o'clock, having been delayed in

reaching the town. There was no time to be lost in order to get it ready for the evening's performance, and we went to work with a will. Planks were secured, and a stage built across one end of the room; shoe-boxes brought in and boards laid across them for seats; lamps were borrowed from the hotel, the floor was swept clean, and we opened that night to a perfect jam.

The first number on the programme was a selection for the Swiss Bells, and in the midst of a very quick passage, necessitating considerable violent exertion on the part of the players, the improvised platform slid outward, and before any effort could be made to prevent the disaster, planks, footlights, bells, bell-table, and performers were piled up in inextricable confusion on the top of the occupants of the first three rows of seats.

To say that things were decidedly mixed, would certainly be no exaggeration, for the scene presented the appearance of a picture taken on the track of a Western cyclone. Fortunately no one was seriously injured, and with the assistance of the gentlemen present the stage was rebuilt, and we went on with the performance.

On another occasion we had improvised a couple of dressing-rooms, one on each side of the stage, with curtains, which every country show is obliged to carry, and in order to save trouble had stretched our rope across the room from wall to wall, this being the principal support of both sets of drapery.

In the evening while we were all busily engaged in getting ready for the stage, this rope suddenly gave way at one end, and down came both curtains, disclos-

ing to the eyes of the surprised audience a vision of life behind the scenes such as they never before had the pleasure of witnessing, and their screams of delight abundantly testified that they thoroughly enjoyed the novelty.

The frantic efforts of the ladies to conceal themselves developed their ability to perform feats of which a contortionist might have felt proud; on the men's side affairs were just about as confused for a few moments until one of the boys, who was caught with nothing on but his under-flannels, mounted a trunk, and snatching his overcoat from the wall, and holding it in front of him, said, "Ladies and gentlemen, lest you should think this an accident, I desire to inform you that it occurs every night, and the only reason we do not advertise it is because we like to give you something that is not on the programme. If you will kindly shut your eyes now for a few moments, we will try and put these curtains in place again. Our piano-player would favor you with a few selections in the mean time, only he is over there behind the harp with nothing on but one sock and a little grease paint, and you will therefore have to excuse him."

As can be imagined, these remarks were greeted with shouts of laughter, in the midst of which we proceeded to repair damages as best we could.

In one town we were obliged to build a stage in the court-house, and on account of a large chimney which projected into the room were obliged to leave an open space of about two feet at the back. Everybody was cautioned to be careful, and work well down to the footlights; but in spite of this our soprano, in her gratification at an unusually hearty reception, forgot the

matter entirely, and stepping back a trifle too far, disappeared as suddenly and as mysteriously (to the audience) as the sprite in the pantomime.

The distance was only about four feet, but she couldn't possibly have screamed any louder, or in a more heart-rending manner, had she fallen from a balloon; but beyond a few slight bruises and a bad fright she was uninjured.

We were leaving Waltham, Mass., one morning when a very embarrassing incident occurred. There was a light snow on the ground, and enough of it had accumulated on the soles of my shoes to make them decidedly slippery. I entered the car with a large satchel in either hand, and a violin-box under one arm, and stepping on one of those iron plates that protrude through the flooring of railway coaches I came down all in a heap. Directly behind me came an elegantly dressed young lady, accompanied by an elderly gentleman who was evidently her father. They were looking

about them anxiously for seats, and were so close at my heels that the young lady stumbled over me, and fell at full length in the aisle; the father, not to be outdone, rushed forward to assist his daughter, and losing his footing, dropped solidly on my chest, with a

force that knocked the breath entirely out of my body, and robbed the subsequent proceedings of all interest to me for the space of fifteen minutes.

When I regained consciousness I found the entire train force, aided by many of the passengers, industriously engaged in dashing water upon me, and it has always been a matter of wonder to me, which I had the narrowest escape from, suffocation or drowning.

CHAPTER X.

FROM 1878 to 1884 my engagements were confined almost exclusively to the Western and Southern country; and during that period, with various companies, I played in every State north and south of the Mason and Dixon line, and in several of the Territories. I shall not attempt to give a detailed account of my travels in those sections, but a few rambling incidents and anecdotes, which recur to my mind at the present time, will perhaps be of interest to the reader, as illustrating the vicissitudes of a showman's life.

It frequently happens that a manager or agent, in laying out a route, accidentally overlooks some important point in connection with railroad time-tables; or perhaps some unexpected change is made in a published schedule; and when this occurs, it invariably entails upon the company loss of money and great inconvenience.

I recollect a case of this kind which happened in the summer of 1880. We were billed to appear in Warrensburg, Mo., on a certain Monday evening, and our next stand for Tuesday night was to be Booneville in the same State. We arrived at Warrensburg Sunday afternoon, and found that if we played there Monday night, it would be impossible to reach Booneville by rail until the following Wednesday morning. It was not politic to cancel either of the towns, as they were both sure to give us good business, and in this dilemma the

management cast about them to devise some plan by which both dates could be filled.

Inquiry developed the fact that Sedalia, Mo., was on the main line of railroad, and was distant by highway from Warrensburg about forty miles. A train would leave the former place at 11 o'clock A.M., reaching Booneville at 2.30 in the afternoon. It was evident, therefore, that our only chance lay in getting to Sedalia in season to catch that train. Accordingly we were obliged to leave Warrensburg in teams immediately at the close of the performance, and make the forty-mile drive on one of the darkest nights I have ever seen, and directly through the famous Younger Brothers country, which, we were informed, was one of the most dangerous and lawless sections in the South-West. The ride was accomplished in safety, however, and we reached Sedalia at nine o'clock the following morning.

There is nothing particularly strange or uncommon about this circumstance, but I have two simple reasons for relating it; first, it gives an idea of one of the peculiar emergencies upon which show people are often called to act, and second, it enables me to relate a very funny little incident which happened to me on the trip.

I rode in a double carriage, the driver and myself being on the front seat, and a gentleman and lady on the back seat. As daylight approached, I began to grow exceedingly drowsy, and, lulled by the gentle motion of the vehicle rolling over the smooth roads, soon fell into a deep slumber. How long I slept I am unable to say, but I awoke with a start to find the sun high in the heavens; looking around at my companions,

I saw that they had all succumbed to exhaustion, and departed to the land of dreams; the driver was nodding away with the lines around his neck, and the faithful horses were moving along at a slow walk.

Thinking it unnecessary to awake them, I sat for some time enjoying the bracing morning air, and gazing listlessly at the bright landscape, when suddenly my head seemed to feel remarkably cool, and putting up my hand to ascertain the cause, I found that I was minus a hat. I looked hastily around in the carriage, but could see nothing of it. We were all obliged by contract to wear silk hats, and, as mine was comparatively a new one I did not feel like losing it, so I awoke the driver, and, after a great deal of grumbling on his part, and some very eloquent argument on mine, finally induced him to turn back.

We drove about three miles without seeing anything of the missing "cady," and the disgusted Jehu had just registered a solemn oath that he wouldn't go two rods further, when I espied a dark object in the middle of the road a short distance ahead. It proved to be my hat: at least, it had evidently been somebody's hat; but oh! what a wreck!

I judged by the looks, that it had caught on the wheel, and been whirled around violently for some distance, until, bruised and bleeding, torn limb from limb, it had lost its grip, and with one last yell of despair (which is probably what woke me up), dropped to the ground and expired, leaving its owner to enter Sedalia bareheaded.

In nearly every travelling troupe there are always one or more young men, upon whom all the girls in

the different towns get violently "mashed," and in our party the fellow who enjoyed this distinction was Jack Westerly. He was a tall, finely formed man, with clear-cut regular features, dark eyes, and a heavy black mustache; always dressed with scrupulous neatness, and thoroughly gentlemanly in his appearance, he was an individual who would attract attention in a throng, and as can readily be imagined he was the daily recipient of many dainty, sweet-scented *billets-doux* from susceptible fair ones, who were desirous of making his acquaintance. Jack was not at all backward about accepting their admiration, although, to his credit be it said, he was never accused of doing a wrong act in his life, but was simply one of those chronic "mashers," who, conscious of his own powers of captivation, could not resist the temptation to use them. This propensity, however, gave us an opportunity on one occasion to nearly frighten him out of his wits, and furnished us with a subject to laugh about for weeks.

As we stepped from the train one morning at a city in Southern Indiana, a beautiful and elegantly dressed young lady who was bidding a party of friends good-by, attracted Jack's attention; she was stooping to bestow a parting kiss upon a small child, and, as she raised her head and looked in his direction, she received a glance from those brilliant eyes that settled the whole business. She was completely enraptured, and during the day she passed and repassed the hotel frequently, sometimes accompanied by a lady friend, and at other times alone.

We learned from the clerk that she was the daughter

of the mayor of the city, who was also the most prominent business man in the place; and this fact rather frightened our irrepresible friend, and he was somewhat slow in making any advances. That night, however, when the performance was over, he was standing at the door as she came out, and managed to find some excuse for addressing her, and the result was, he accompanied her home, and for nearly an hour stood talking with her at the front gate of her father's residence.

The great beauty of the young lady, her position in society, and the general circumstances surrounding the case, led Jack to regard it as the greatest conquest of his life; and when he returned to the hotel he was inflated to such a degree that the boys decided it was a favorable opportunity to carry out a scheme they had been planning for some time.

We reached our next stand about ten o'clock the following morning, and had just entered the hotel, and deposited our satchels, when the landlord inquired if there was any one in the party by the name of Jack Westerly.

"Yes, here I am," replied that worthy, and he was handed a telegram, which he opened, and as his eye fell on the contents he turned deadly pale, crushed the envelope in his hands, and walked over to the window.

"What's the matter, Jack?" asked some one; "anybody dead?"

"Oh, no," he replied, trying to force a tone of composure into his voice, "only a little matter of business."

A short time later he sidled over to the counter and inquired confidentially of the clerk where would be

the best place to purchase a good revolver, and receiving the necessary directions he started out.

Upon his return a half-hour later the colored porter, who had been duly coached in the interim, accosted him with :

“Say, boss, is your name Westerly?”

“Yes, yes,” returned poor Jack, trembling in every limb, “what’s the matter now?”

“Wall, dar’s ben a big stout man roun’ hyar lookin’ fer you, an’ he sed he’d be back in ’bout half an hour; and ter tell ye de troof, boss, I done tink he was crazy, he acted so wild like.”

This was more than the now thoroughly frightened fellow could stand, and noticing a group of the boys sitting over in the corner, he rushed into their midst, and in a husky voice said, —

“Look here, boys, I’m in an awful fix, and I don’t know what the result is going to be. You know that girl that got mashed on me in the last town? Well, I got this telegram from her a little while ago; just glance at it, and you’ll see what the matter is;” and he handed over the despatch, which read :

“Father knows all. Will be there on the next train. Look out.”

Gravely they passed it around the circle, each man reading it with a look of deepest concern, and then shaking his head in a dubious manner as though to express his individual idea that it was a terrible piece of business anyway.

“Well, now, fellows, I’ll tell you just what I have made up my mind to do,” said the poor chap; “I am a gentleman, as you all know, and I treated that girl as

a gentleman should. 'Twas only a little harmless flirtation, and I don't propose to allow any old shyster to come up here and poke holes through my body, without giving him a warm reception. I've been out and bought a six-shooter, and every barrel is loaded. If he comes alone I can take care of him, but he might hire four or five toughs to come with him, and if he does, I want you all to stick by me. You'll do it, won't you, boys?"

This was a little more than ordinary human nature could stand. The pitiful expression on his face and his earnestness of manner were irresistible, and simultaneously the gang exploded in a yell of uncontrollable laughter.

That of course gave the whole thing away, and, although it must have been a great relief to his anxiety, his mortification at being taken in and done for in such a completely successful manner outweighed all other feelings, and for a week he refused to speak to any in the party. At the expiration of that time, however, his better nature asserted itself, and the final result was an oyster supper, at his expense, during the progress of which he acknowledged that it was a good joke, and agreed to bury the hatchet.

CHAPTER XI.

THE country hall, on the stage of which the sometimes impecunious, but always hopeful, Thespian "struts his brief hour," is a curiosity in its way, and will bear a trifling description. I use the word "it"

in this connection advisedly, for one of them is a type of all.

It is not infrequently christened "Opera House," or "Academy of Music," or some other high-sounding title, for which let us charitably hope its sponsor may be forgiven in the hereafter.

It forms a most invaluable quantity in the social economy of the town, and the versatility of its uses is something remarkable.

It shelters alike the just and the unjust, and during its natural career is the abiding-place of town meetings and theatres, Dorcas societies and female minstrels, church festivals and variety aggregations, dances and temperance lectures, with religious services and roller-skating sandwiched in spasmodically.

Attached to this public institution is an individual known as the janitor, whose principal duties consist in collecting the rent and passing in the citizens free of charge. On occasions demanding the exercise of these functions, his punctuality is something little short of phenomenal; but at all other times he manages to absent himself so effectually that it is impossible to find him without a search-warrant.

The hall is usually about half seated with settees of a dozen different styles of architecture, all of them exhibiting a greater or less degree of rheumatic ruin, and showing indications of the rapid approach of complete dissolution. But, bless you, appearances are deceitful, for those same settees have been in their present condition since the youthful days of the oldest inhabitant, and are as near eternal as anything of an earthly nature can be; and they are, after all, blessings

in disguise to the strolling player, for during the performance, four or five of them are sure to collapse with their loads of rustics, an event which probably gets the only laugh of the evening.

In one corner is a stove which stands on one leg and two bricks, and presents a dejected appearance in entire sympathy with the settees. Its only door hangs by one hinge, and sags down in a reckless and disreputable manner, disclosing an opening about two inches in width, which has for years been the target for tobacco-chewers, whose marksmanship, judging from external appearances, has been sadly deficient.

The walls and ceiling are frescoed with dried and withering fragments of pine boughs and evergreen; mournful relics they are, suggestive of the decorative splendor of some former school exhibition.

The box-office of this temple of amusement is a windy corner of the first landing from the street, and is sumptuously furnished with a table whose north-east leg is two inches shorter than the remaining three; a soap-box in lieu of a chair; and a greasy, smoke-begrimed lamp which stubbornly refuses to shed any light under the most favorable circumstances, and promptly goes out entirely every time the door is opened.

Here through the long evening sits the treasurer of the "combination" in an atmosphere composed in equal parts of rheumatism, pneumonia, and neuralgia; and when the last "buckwheat" has passed in he gathers up his cash, rises wearily, catches his pants on a nail lying in ambush in the soap-box, and tears a slit a foot long; he then swears artistically and grammati-

cally for about five minutes, kicks the table and the lamp down-stairs, and goes back on the stage to "make up" for a small part.

But the crowning glory of the country hall lies in its stage and the appointments thereof. These consist in part of two pieces of scenery — an interior and an exterior — painted on drops; and it is a singular fact that while one end of the scene rolls gracefully into the flies, the other nearly always remains stationary, pointing towards the stage at an angle of forty-five degrees. This can, of course, usually be remedied by taking a few turns of the rope around the offending end, but as the trouble is never discovered until the entertainment is in progress it invariably results in annoyance.

A case in point occurs to me just now; I have forgotten the name of the play, but the scene to be disclosed was one in which a clergyman was to be discovered kneeling at the bedside of a dying lady. The performers took their positions, the cue was given, and the scene slowly ascended with the usual result, aggravated in this case by the fact that it "stuck dead" and refused to budge either one way or the other. The stage carpenter pulled and pushed, the property-man tugged and swore, the audience laughed and "guyed," and the poor actor who personated the clergyman remained in his uncomfortable position on the hard, carpetless stage, the pain in his knees growing more unbearable every moment. Finally when it became evident that all attempts to move it would be futile, he could stand it no longer, and shouting, "Amen" at the top of his voice he arose to his feet, and limping to the footlights said, —

“Ladies and gentlemen, you will excuse me for saying Amen, as it wasn't in the lines at all, but it was a question of closing that prayer or being a cripple the remainder of my life. We will now drop the curtain and build a new hall.”

The paucity of the scenic embellishments, however, is atoned for in a measure by the remarkable scope of usefulness displayed by these two drops. The exterior invariably represents every animate and inanimate object which a person would be supposed to meet with out of doors, and is used with the greatest impartiality as a landscape, a garden, a thick wood, or a street.

Its perspective is wondrous strange and queer, and among the startling features depicted are a railroad track which bulges suddenly out of the ground on a side hill, and comes to an end with equal abruptness at the foot of a large tree: a steamboat sailing placidly along, unmindful of the fact that it is rapidly approaching a seven-by-nine chasm in the rocks through which the river flows, at the imminent risk of sweeping away its smoke-stack, pilot-house, and entire upper deck, the contemplation of which catastrophe keeps a nervous spectator in a frame of mind bordering on insanity: a horse whose head towers above the neighboring tree-tops: and a house by the side of which stands a man who is evidently studying as to how he is going to get inside, it apparently not occurring to him that judging from the disparity in their sizes, he might easily lift the building up and put in on over his head, or take the roof off and step in over the sides.

The interior scene is a strange mixture of parlor, plain chamber, and kitchen, and on its surface are repre-

sented appurtenances and objects peculiar to any part of any house in any country and among any class of society. A Farmer's Almanac hangs side by side with an elegant oil painting; an old-fashioned eight-day clock hobnobs with a richly carved bookcase; and a shelf containing a miscellaneous collection of crockery-ware, candlesticks, and old bottles, appears to be perfectly at ease among costly bric-a-brac of every description.

It will readily be observed that these two scenes are thoroughly cosmopolitan in character, and with the exercise of a proper amount of imagination on the part of the audience can easily be made to do duty for any drama under the sun. They are usually painted by some stranded actor, who takes the job for ten dollars and his board while he is at work, the latter condition probably accounting for the large amount of labor expended and the great variety of objects displayed; in fact, occasional blank spaces on the canvas lead one to imagine that the artist must have been overtaken by death, or else stumbled upon an engagement before the work was completed, or he would never have left good board and lodging so long as a particle of paint would adhere to the cloth.

The stage is fearfully and wonderfully made, and is the handiwork of the local carpenter. It rises up unexpectedly in some places, and sinks down in others, so that a trip across it produces a feeling akin to seasickness. Some of the boards are always loose, and when stepped upon they creak mournfully, as though threatening to plunge the venturesome Thespian into the regions below.

The footlights are common lamps placed in a row along the front of the alleged stage, their brilliancy enhanced by tin shades; and in this connection I recall to mind a small town in Wisconsin where the janitor, in preparing the hall for the evening's performance, innocently placed the tins *behind* the lamps with their reflecting surfaces toward the auditorium, producing an effect ludicrous in the extreme. When anything in the shape of dancing is on the stage, those lamps and reflectors enter heartily into the spirit of the occasion, and endeavor to the best of their ability to keep time with the performer: this necessitates "eternal vigilance" upon the part of the members of the orchestra, and their desperate efforts to render soul-entrancing music, and at the same time keep the illuminating apparatus from getting down and wandering promiscuously around the hall, are absolutely heart-rending.

But one set of wings are used for both scenes, and they are stationary, — so terribly stationary, in fact, that nothing short of dynamite will move them. The flies consist of two strips of plain cotton cloth and a miscellaneous collection of cobwebs, the latter being the more prominent of the two.

As can readily be imagined, the realistic effects produced by this combination are not sufficiently startling to disturb one's mental equilibrium to any particular extent, and although the President of the United States is undoubtedly a hard-worked and much-abused man, it seems quite likely that he has just as much fun in the same length of time as the stage manager of a country show.

CHAPTER XII.

I APPROACH the subject of dressing-rooms with fear and trepidation, fully realizing my inability to do them justice.

There are usually two of these, one for ladies and one for gents, situated at opposite sides of the stage. The floor of the gents' room is covered with a four-ply carpet of tobacco-juice and the accumulated dirt of centuries. It is furnished with a board shelf running the entire length of one side of the room, on which is scattered in graceful and disgraceful profusion a heterogeneous collection of burned matches, cigar butts, old bottles, pieces of candle, dabs of red and white powder, bent pins, and numerous charred corks with which the last amateur minstrel company "blacked up;" for be it known that the world is progressing in the acquirement of knowledge daily, and the old theory that the minstrels always used wheel grease has long since been exploded.

Over this shelf hangs a large frame, and in the lower left-hand corner is a triangular scrap of mirror about the size of a piece of restaurant pie, and usually with about the same power of reflection. Before this crumbling relic eight or ten Thespians push and jostle each other for an hour in a frantic effort to locate paint and powder on their faces in a proper manner, and this alleged glass is responsible for many of the humorous incidents which serve to illumine the lives of the poor players.

With a dramatic company travelling through the small towns of the West a few years ago, was a comedian by the name of Bill Dyke, a tall, lank Down-Easter, an excellent performer, but a man who drank constantly both in and out of season. Warnings or examples had no effect on him whatever; it was a habit which he could not break, and yet I don't think any man or woman living ever saw him drunk; but the liquor was there all the same, undermining his robust constitution daily.

In one of those cramped dressing-rooms to which I have referred, Bill was industriously engaged one night in lining his face for broad comedy, and, standing directly in front of the small mirror, his tall form completely obscured it from the view of the other members of the company.

Harry De Witt, the "juvenile man," had for some time been dodging back and forth behind Bill in a vain endeavor to get a glimpse into the glass, until finally becoming discouraged he sank into a chair and exclaimed in an injured tone of voice,—

"For Heaven's sake, Bill, get away from that glass, and give some one else a chance. I've been jumping around here for half an hour, and I haven't even got a sight of the frame."

Turning quickly around, Bill cast a startled glance at Harry, and then leaning against the shelf for support, he breathed a deep sigh of relief, and said,—

"My God! was that you? Well, my boy, you've saved my life, for when I saw that face leering at me over my shoulder, I just thought the tremens was com-

ing on me sure, and I think that in five minutes more I should have taken out my razor and cut my throat from Genesis to Revelations."

These dressing-rooms are always abundantly supplied with windows, in the sashes of which are grouped artistically old hats, pieces of tin, pasteboard box covers, rags, and, at rare intervals, a small square of dirty glass. The frames are so warped and shrunken that cats, dogs, tramps, and other midnight prowlers can enter through the cracks without inconvenience of any sort.

The doors are in even a worse condition, and are so terribly "out of plumb" that the combined strength of the entire company is inefficient to close them more than half way. This state of affairs offers unlimited opportunities for draughts, breezes, and northern zephyrs to get in their fiendish work, advantages which they are not slow to improve; and the weak and puny blaze dignified by the name of fire, confined in the little barrel stove about the size of a collar-box, after repeated attempts to demonstrate the fact of its existence, finally gives up in disgust, throws up both hands and expires completely, and the actors wish they could do the same.

On the walls can be found, in a million different styles of chirography, the names of seven out of every ten performers who ever crossed the threshold. A burning desire to perpetuate his name, and send it ringing down the highways and byways of the future through the medium of dressing-room walls, appears to be the first law of nature with the average performer, and the deciphering of the hieroglyphics which extend

from ceiling to floor, serves to while away many an otherwise tedious moment.

"Charlie Pickum, Banjo Soloist," is invariably followed in different handwriting by such endearing appellations as "Ham," "Bum," "Snide," "Rotten," etc., evidently added by some rival jealous of Charlie's ability.

"Laninkstoop and Axingdale. Double Song and Dance Artists. Big hit. Got three encores." And they might also have added, three "auld lang syne" eggs and one dead cat. They probably forgot to mention that, however.

"billy petersen, stump speaker, with Alabaster joe's injun meddersun combinashun, nocked em silly the first nite."

And so he did. So silly, in fact, that no one but the janitor came near the second night.

"Boggs Family Concert Co." "Big house. (\$320.00.)" If these figures are correct, the general admission to this entertainment must have been just forty dollars, as there were exactly eight people in the house.

"Second Baptist Church Fair and Sociable, April 17th." This calls up melancholy visions of fish-ponds where you pay five cents for the privilege of dangling a hook and line over the side of a barrel, and when you think you have got hold of something, jerk it out suddenly and jab the hook in your eye: where you subscribe hundreds of dollars more than you ever expect to possess, on "chance books," in the hands of fair damsels, and finally go home with your new light pants covered with custard pie.

Then follows a series of heart-rending inscriptions which tell plainer than spoken words the hopeless condition of their writers :

“Jonah Town.”

“Showman’s graveyard.”

“Abandon hope, all ye who enter here.”

“Our good ship sails to-night, but we shall walk.”

“Philpot’s Dramatic Company, fourteen people. And may the Lord have mercy on our poor foolish souls.”

And occasionally in some out-of-the-way corner you will find a place where some witty, though somewhat sarcastic, “fakir” has scrawled, —

“Norman Toothaker.

India Rubber Man.

Kind regards to Edwin Booth.”

And so it goes on forever. Everybody “guys” the man who constantly registers in halls, and they are the butts for all sorts of jibes and jokes ; but let me caution you, my son : be not too ready with your quizzing, lest in some unguarded moment you might be caught, pencil in hand, industriously engaged in inscribing your name and line of business on the back of a wing, where the next man doing the same kind of an act will find it and add in large letters the cabalistic word, “Rats.” For of such is the kingdom of show-folks.

CHAPTER XIII.

TRAVELLING about from place to place during an entire season, thrown into communication constantly with all sorts of peculiar people, laughable incidents are of daily and almost hourly occurrence.

A party with which I was connected were advertised to appear in a little town called Lanesville, in Wisconsin; and, arriving in the early morning, we soon got settled at the hotel, and went over to the hall to arrange things for the evening performance. As usual, a crowd of the village loafers gathered around to watch operations. After prowling around for some time in a vain search for a hammer, nails, step-ladder, and other necessary articles, we became disgusted; and one of our boys suddenly addressed one of the rustics with, —

“For heaven’s sake! isn’t there any janitor around this hall?”

The bucolic hesitated for a moment, glanced about him appealingly as if looking for inspiration from his fellows, and then replied somewhat doubtfully, —

“Wall, I don’t believe ther is; ther used to be two or three of ’em layin’ round, but the last show that was here stole ’em all.”

In Winterset, Ia., our leader of orchestra, while sitting around the office-stove, became engaged in conversation with an amateur musician of the town. The talk naturally drifted to violins, when it transpired that the citizen was engaged in making a violin of the famous Cremona model. This was quite a surprise to our friend, for it is a well-known fact that the manufacture of this magnificent instrument requires the exercise of the most delicate skill and judgment, as well as years of experience; and he did not hesitate to express his astonishment.

“Why,” said he, “do you know anything about a Cremona?”

"Do I know anything about one?" ejaculated the native. "Well, I should think I ought to: I lived in the same house with old Cremona for over two years."

In Connellsville, Ind., my friend Jack and myself started out one morning to find the hall. Strolling down the main street we spied some remnants of bills clinging to a bulletin board in a wide doorway; and, without asking any questions, we ascended a broad flight of stairs, and entered a large hall, seated with ordinary settees. Directly in the centre of the stage (which was devoid of scenery) was a large coal-stove, in which was a glowing fire; and in front of the platform was a cabinet-organ, with hymn-books scattered around promiscuously everywhere.

"Some church has been holding a prayer-meeting here," said Jack, "and I suppose they expect us to clean up the place; but I'll be blowed if I touch it; and if they don't come and take that stove off the stage, we'll hire some one to do it, and take it out of the hall rent."

We found that our baggage had not yet arrived from the station, and, as it was warm and cosy inside, we decided to wait for it. I was sitting in front of the organ idly running over the keys, and Jack was standing on the stage in front of the stove, his hands behind him, his coat-tails spread wide apart, and his briar-wood pipe smoking like a furnace. Suddenly the door opened, and two dignified elderly gentlemen entered and walked slowly down the aisle.

"Good-morning, gentlemen!" said Jack. "Can you tell me who has charge of this hall?"

"Well, we supposed that we had," said the oldest of

the two, somewhat severely, "but it appears that you people have relieved us of the responsibility."

This sarcastic answer ruffled Jack's temper, and he replied sharply, —

"We are probably paying enough for the use of the old barn to entitle us to some privileges; but there is one thing that we do want, and that is that you get some one to take this stove off the stage as soon as possible, so we can arrange things for evening."

As the true state of affairs began to dawn on them, amused smiles played over the faces of the two men.

"I am afraid, my friend," said one, "that you have made a trifling mistake in the place."

"Why, isn't this Andes Hall?" asked Jack.

"Oh, no," was the laughing reply: "this is the Second Presbyterian Church."

That settled it. Jack always swore that he didn't touch a single stair in getting to the sidewalk; and I was in such a dazed condition that it was several seconds before I could blurt out an apology, and stumble after him.

We met an hour after in the hotel-office, went into a committee of the whole, and passed the following resolution: —

Whereas, Having by our freshness made measly fools of ourselves, —

Be it resolved, that we will never do so again if we know it.

While on the stage one night in Mishawaka, Ind., doing a specialty, every light in the building went out without an instant's warning. Stage, dressing-rooms, and auditorium were left at once in impenetrable gloom. Women screamed, men yelled, and there

was a wild rush for the doors. For a moment it seemed impossible to avert a frightful panic, but a few gentlemen cooler than the rest managed to make their voices heard above the din, and begged the people to be calm. Quiet being restored in a measure, an investigation was held, which developed the fact that the gasoline apparatus used in lighting the building had become disarranged in some way, and prematurely suspended business just when I was most in need of its services.

At another time in Hudson, Wis., I was sent on by the manager to make an announcement, and just as I reached the footlights, the rope holding the drop-curtain broke, and down came the roll, striking me with full force on the top of the head. That audience don't know to this day what remarks I was going to make, for I promptly and unhesitatingly lost all consciousness for the space of half an hour, and had it not been that the curtain was an extremely light one, should probably have ended my earthly career then and there.

CHAPTER XIV.

A PARTY with which I was travelling through the West in the season of 1878 and 1879 had for its principal cornet player a young man whose name was Mike. He was an excellent musician, a whole-souled, good-natured, good-hearted fellow in every way, and a man who would make any sacrifice rather than commit a wrong; but he was beyond any doubt the most noto-

rious liar on two continents. Not that his lies were malicious, or calculated in any way to do mischief; they were simply big stories coined in his own fertile brain, and evidently told because he couldn't help it.

He claimed to be twenty-two years of age, and one of his great hobbies was to relate his experiences in different parts of the country, and in different lines of business. One of our boys who had listened to his stories for a few weeks decided that he must be a great deal older than he claimed, and announced his intention of keeping a record of the principal events of Mike's career as related by himself, for the purpose of gaining some definite idea as to his real age.

This plan he followed faithfully for some time, carefully jotting down in a little book the result of his observations, and depending entirely upon the fairy tales that fell from the lips of the innocent narrator.

Finally, after a month had elapsed, we were sitting around the office stove one night after the performance, several commercial men and other guests of the house being present. Mike was in high feather, and regaled the party with several thrilling stories and hair-breadth escapes, in which he was always the central figure. At the conclusion of one particularly Munchausen-like tale, there was a brief interval of silence, when Harry, the party who had been keeping the record, and who was afflicted with a bad case of stammering, slowly drawled out, —

“M-M-M-Mike, this m-m-must be your s-s-s-second t-time on earth.”

“Why, what do you mean by that?” said Mike indignantly.

“Y-y-you’re certainly m-m-m-more than t-t-twenty-two years old.”

“And I tell you that I am not. I shall be twenty-two years old next month.”

“Yes,” said his tormentor, “and I’ve g-g-g-got your own f-f-figures to prove that you are one hundred and f-f-fifty-seven. Just you l-l-look here.”

And with that, he pulled out a paper, covered with figures, and handed it to the stage manager with a request that he read it, which he did as follows:—

Left home at age of	16 years.
On Mississippi River Steamboat	5 “
Herding Cattle in Texas	5 “
Travelled with Circus	4 “
Gold Mining in California	3 “
Railroad Brakeman	2 “
Worked in Rolling Mill	3 “
Followed the Sea	4 “
Sick in Bed unable to move	3 “
Travelled with Minstrel Troupe	2 “
Street Fakir	4 “
Trip to Europe	2 “
Studied Medicine	3 “
On Orange Grove in Florida	2 “

But at this point in the reading, Mike could stand it no longer, and made a precipitate rush from the office to his room, where he remained in seclusion until it was time to take the train for the next stand, and it was several days before he could again muster up courage to recount any of his marvellous exploits.

Poor Mike! I verily believe that he must have been born under an unlucky star, for he seemed to be continually subject to all sorts of petty annoyances from which the rest of us were usually exempt. If anything

of a disagreeable nature occurred, he was always sure to be in a position where he would get the worst of it, and nothing but his imperturbable good-nature and remarkably equable temperament prevented him from developing into a gloomy misanthrope.

A fire in a small hotel, in which we were stopping, placed our friend in one of the most unpleasant, and, at the same time, one of the most laughable predicaments it has ever been my lot to witness. The fire broke out about two o'clock in the morning, and when discovered had gained such headway, that it was at once plainly evident that nothing could save the building from total destruction. It was a small village, with no fire department, and the only means at hand to extinguish the blaze was the old-fashioned method of passing buckets along a line of people from hand to hand.

The members of the company and other guests hurriedly gathered up their effects, and escaped to the opposite sidewalk, where they stood, watching the progress of the flames. Suddenly it was noticed that the irrepressible Mike was absent from the group, and a careful search developed the fact that no one had seen him since the excitement began. In an instant, every one was in a perfect fever of alarm and apprehension, for the missing one was a general favorite with the entire party; all sorts of surmises were made, and a couple of volunteers were just about to enter the burning structure, at the risk of their lives, to institute a search for the unfortunate, or to secure his remains, if possible, before they were cremated, when a series of unearthly yells rang out upon the air.

resounding shrill and clear above the crackling of the flames, and emanating evidently from some person in dire distress, in the rear of the doomed hotel.

At once there was a wild stampede for the back side of the building, and upon arriving there, we were greeted by a sight which for extreme ludicrousness I have never seen equalled. It was so intensely funny, in fact, that its very serious aspect was momentarily forgotten, and for a brief space of time the large crowd of people were simply speechless and helpless, in a fit of convulsive laughter, in which the owner of the rapidly burning property could not refrain from joining. As for the members of the troupe, they actually laid down on the ground and rolled and howled.

It seems that Mike, who occupied a room on the third floor back, had not been awakened at the first alarm, but peacefully slept on, all unconscious of impending danger. The fire gained headway rapidly, growing fiercer and more furious every moment, and at last he awoke with a start, to find himself nearly suffocated with the smoke. Dazed and bewildered, he rushed to the door and threw it open, only to find his escape completely cut off in that direction by a solid wall of fire, roaring and hissing through the narrow passageway.

At this juncture, he remembered that the sole window in his room opened on a shed, and, with a feeling of devout thankfulness, he threw up the sash and jumped out on the roof. Here he was comparatively safe for the time, but as he was still some twenty feet from the ground, he began to look around for some place to descend. In his hurry to escape from the

room, he had neglected to secure his clothing, and was clad in but a single garment, a long, thick red flannel night-shirt; the near approach of the flames, however, made him entirely regardless of wardrobe, and he decided that the best thing he could do would be to hang off over the edge of the roof at arm's length, and drop gently as possible to terra firma.

This idea he proceeded at once to put into execution, and it worked splendidly up to the point where he let go with his hands. Just there his evil genius put in an appearance: the aforesaid night-shirt caught on a large nail, and poor Mike was left hanging high and dry in mid-air on the side of the shed, in a perfectly helpless condition, and it was the uncomfortable position in which he was placed that had led him to emit those terrific war-whoops which first attracted our attention.

With the aid of a ladder we succeeded in rescuing him, practically unhurt, but the sight that he presented, suspended there between heaven and earth, his long legs dangling in the air, as he kicked the side of the building and yelled blue murder, was a spectacle that the witnesses will not forget to their dying day.

CHAPTER XV.

I WAS engaged with a small minstrel company touring the North-west, one season, and in the party was a reckless, dare-devil sort of a fellow by the name of Joe Peele. He was the greatest practical joker I have ever met, and it really seemed as though he must lay

awake nights to concoct some of his ridiculous schemes for fun and mischief.

His great delight was to stand on the rear platform of a train of cars as it was passing out of a station, and, singling out some odd or eccentric-appearing individual, apply to him all sorts of threats and epithets, and accuse him of some act of meanness or wrong-doing. This always created a great deal of merriment among the boys, and left the poor victim in a state of utter bewilderment; and, although he had been repeatedly warned, threatened, and even fined for the offence by the management, it still seemed impossible for him to desist.

We were leaving Albert Lea, Minn., one morning, and among the crowd gathered at the station to see the "show folks" was a tall, overgrown, "gawky" specimen of humanity, who was evidently a representative from the rural districts. As the train moved slowly from the depot, Joe, who was in his usual position on the rear platform, spied the rustic, and, shaking his fist at him fiercely, he shouted, —

"Ah! there you are, you dirty loafer. I've been looking for you for the last six months. It's lucky for you that this train is just pulling out, for if I could get at you, I'd learn you to burn people's barns, and destroy their property. You wait. I'll get hold of you yet."

In the midst of the hearty laughter which this outburst provoked, the train came to a stop, and commenced to back down on a side track, and before the thoroughly frightened Joe could secrete himself, the exasperated granger boarded the car, and proceeded to wipe the floor with him, ejaculating in the mean time, —

"You'll teach me to burn barns, will ye? I'm a

dirty loafer, am I? You've been looking for me for six months, have ye? Well, now you've found me," and with that he picked the unfortunate joker up bodily, and tossed him over into the coal-box, then calmly walked out, remarking to the bystanders, —

"I kinder reckon he must have made a mistake in the party."

It is, perhaps, needless to state that that little joke was not repeated again that season.

One of the most prolific sources of amusement in the daily routine of the ordinary show is the band parade. I recollect one occasion in Cresco, Ia., where our band of thirteen pieces was marching through the streets, and were obliged to pass one of those large union school buildings peculiar to the Western country, where the entire educational system of the town is confined under one roof: it happened to be just at the usual recess hour, and there being a damp snow on the ground, we were attacked by fully three hundred school children of all ages and sizes, who proceeded to annihilate us with snowballs.

For fully fifteen minutes we were pelted most unmercifully, and when they finally desisted, a more demoralized group than we were would be hard to find. The beautiful snow was everywhere; horns were stuffed full of it; ears and eyes were plugged up; great balls were wedged in our coat collars and dripping down our backs; tall hats were smashed, and a hole knocked in the bass drum. Oh! how we longed to get at the young ruffians; but every one realized that such a course would be bad business policy, and so we were obliged to make the best of it, and the only satisfaction

we got was the information from one of the little rascals, that the principal had deprived the entire school of their recess for one month as punishment for their escapade.

One of the funniest runaway accidents that I ever saw occurred in Falls City, Neb., and was caused by a show band. An old farmer was driving leisurely up the main street of the village, with a pair of lean, half-starved-looking mules, attached to a rickety old wagon. He was leaning lazily forward, both elbows upon his knees, and apparently absorbed in deep thought. In the mean time, our band was coming up a side street, and just as the mules' heads poked past the corner, we struck up one of those heavy marching quicksteps; the long-eared ponies gave one jump, turned completely around, upset the wagon, spilled the old man out into a big mud hole, cleared themselves from the wreck, and flew out on the prairie at a forty clip.

Of course we stopped the music as soon as we saw what had happened, and the whole thing transpired so quickly that the ancient agriculturist was actually unable to comprehend what had happened, and when he realized that he was uninjured, he just sat up in the soft marshy clay, with the mud and water dripping from his chin, nose, ears, and hair, and stared in speechless amazement, first at the ruined cart, then at the fleeing mules, and then at his wet, bedraggled, and filthy clothing, as though trying to determine what sort of a visitation of Providence he had been the victim of.

Gradually, however, the sight of the boys standing around with their horns and drums recalled his scattered

senses to a degree, and as a full understanding of the nature of the trouble dawned upon him, he developed into an awful mad man. He vowed he would make the "cussed play actors" pay him well for the damages, and even went so far as to consult a lawyer in regard to the matter; but later in the day, the mules having been captured and returned, the present of sufficient money to repair the wagon, and a half-dozen tickets to the show so appeased his anger that he concluded to allow us to depart without, as he at first threatened to do, "tying us all up in knots."

In Concordia, Kan., while making a parade one day, we had occasion to pass over a narrow plank walk, temporarily placed over a ditch where some excavations were being made. The party who manipulated the bass drum was a great "masher," and becoming involved in a desperate flirtation with a couple of young ladies in the window of a neighboring factory, he made a mis-step, lost his equilibrium, and down he went, drum and all, a distance of ten feet into the miry chasm. Beyond a few bruises, he was unhurt, but there wasn't enough of the drum left to hold an inquest over.

At another time, we were marching through the streets of Louisiana, Mo. It was the occasion of some local celebration, and was also the usual weekly market day, and, as a consequence, the town was literally crowded with people.

Coming up the main thoroughfare in wide open order, so as to make as great a display as possible, we passed a large building, on the balcony of which another band happened to be playing at the time. Of

course, professional pride prompted both sides to make as much noise as their lungs were capable of, and this fact, together with the rattling of the wagons over the paved streets, made the din almost deafening.

As the head of our column reached the intersection of a side street, the boys were horrified to see a pair of horses attached to a heavy dray dashing up the road and approaching the crossing with frightful rapidity. Everybody at once made a break for a place of safety, in which effort they were joined by the bystanders, for no one knew which way the frightened animals might turn. As soon as we reached the sidewalk we glanced around, and there in the middle of the street, solitary and alone, marching along serenely, and clashing the cymbals together with all the force possible, was Tom Delaney, our property man. Misled by the music of the other band, and with his attention somewhat distracted by the animated scenes transpiring around him, he had not noticed the commotion ahead, and was plodding blissfully along, unconscious of any trouble.

We all shouted at once, and Tom looked up just in time to see the infuriated, half-crazed steeds dash around the corner within twenty feet of him. Dropping the cymbals, he made for a telegraph pole, and was half way to the top before you could say "Jack Robinson," and there he clung, pale and trembling, until notified by the boys that the danger was past. The whole thing of course happened in much less time than it takes to tell it, but the laughter and amusement it created proved a most valuable advertisement, and was the means of packing our house to suffocation that evening.

CHAPTER XVI.

ALTHOUGH laughable incidents are plentiful and humorous experiences of almost hourly occurrence, still the daily life of the cross-roads showman is fraught with very many vexations and discomforts. "What makes them follow such a disagreeable business?" is a question often asked, and it is a very difficult one to answer, but certain it is that when a man once gets into the business, and becomes convinced that he has a natural aptitude for it, he remains there for good, although he is always "going to quit after one more season."

In the smaller class of towns, the unreasonable prejudice against show people seems to be nearly, if not quite, as strong as it was twenty-five years ago, and the "Knights of the sock and buskin" appear to be tolerated simply as a sort of necessary evil. This feeling extends to nearly every one with whom they are thrown in contact, and is the cause of many petty annoyances which might easily be avoided.

Take the hotels for an example: in consideration of the fact that a manager brings eight, ten, twelve or fifteen people into his house at one time, the landlord makes a special rate, which is a certain reduction from his usual tariff for transient guests. This is of course right and proper, and is simply an illustration of the universal business principle which makes a concession in favor of the wholesale purchaser as against the

- retail.

But mark the sequel. The moment the landlord has signed the contract giving the company the reduced rates, he immediately concentrates all the energies of his mind and body in an effort to equalize matters; i. e., to get the same amount *per capita* from the troupe that he would from a single individual. It must at once be obvious, to even the dullest comprehension, that this can only be accomplished by one method, and that is, to curtail the amount and the quality of the accommodation, and the average Boniface (there are many exceptions of course, and I know of hotels in this country where members of the profession are treated with the utmost respect, courtesy, and liberality, and made to feel that they are at least on a par with the rest of poor humanity); still, the average landlord, I say, has this principle reduced to a science.

Let us glance for a moment at the daily hotel life of a performer when on the road. A company arrives in town, we will say at five o'clock in the morning, after riding all night. They are, of course, tired, sleepy, and travel-stained, and are naturally anxious for an opportunity to bathe and get a little rest. They politely ask the landlord if they can have their rooms at once. That worthy informs them tersely that such a thing would be impossible, and gives several reasons, all of which are equally false and inconsistent. He says that the agent told him they would not be there until noon, and that all the beds are occupied (this in the face of the fact that the register shows but two arrivals in a week); or that his wife is not yet up, and the rooms are not arranged, or that he was not aware there were to be so many people (his name is signed to the con-

tract for the full number), and would have to put up more beds.

So the poor people, half dead with fatigue, are obliged to sit around in the dreary office or still more dismal sitting-room through the long hours of the morning. Inquiry develops the fact that breakfast will be ready at eight o'clock. There is a seven-o'clock meal, but that is only for the regular boarders who work in the shops and factories in town. It is a quarter to nine when a fiend incarnate rushes through the hallway beating a cracked gong; and the terrific din passing through the aching heads and exhausted nervous systems of the poor actors has the effect of destroying what little appetite they may have had.

It is the same old dining-room, with its two long tables, one on each side of the room, their pine tops only partially concealed by the ragged covers, wet with coffee stains, and strewn with crumbs, relics of the mechanics' feast of an hour before. The same frowsy-headed and freckled female (how well we know her), with her hair in curl papers, makes a tour up and down the length of the room, regaling the guests with the time-honored legend "Beefsteak or Pork Chops." "Tea or Coffee." Somebody wants an egg, but they are out of eggs: ditto, milk. It is Friday, perhaps, and a piece of fish is ordered; but the female announces that there is no fish, and goes to the slide, where she makes an audible remark to the cook about half-starved hogs who expect fish and meat at the same meal. A little toast would at least be palatable, but there is no cold bread in the house, and hot, leaden biscuits and soggy "johnny-cake" are the only available substitutes.

The alleged breakfast being finished, some one hunts up the landlord, and asks him if the rooms are ready yet. He answers sharply, —

“No, the rooms are not ready yet, and when they are, I’ll let you know;” and he also volunteers the information that “show people are a darned sight more bother than they are worth anyway,” and that this is the last troupe he will ever let into his house at any price.

Finally, however, the rooms are announced as being in readiness, and every one grabs a satchel, and starts aloft in search of a little much-needed rest.

It is more than likely that some reader of these lines never saw the rooms reserved for actors in a small country hotel, and a description of one of them will not be out of place.

It is usually located in the back of the house on the fourth floor, unless the hotel happens to be five stories in height, in which case it will be found farther up. It is always reached by the most circuitous route possible, and it was undoubtedly a showman, who, leaving the office one night to go to his room, left a call for five o’clock in the morning; and after following the porter through a series of winding and tortuous passages, up steps and down steps, and around corners, until he at last reached his apartment in a state of total bewilderment, immediately rang the bell, and notified the clerk that he had better call him at once, or he would never get down in time.

Its dimensions are usually about seven by nine feet, with a ceiling so low that an average sized man can pick the dead flies off it without standing on tiptoe.

The plastering has grown so weak and decrepit with old age that it is fast losing its grip on the lathing, and occasional bare spots here and there fill the occupant's mind with dread, lest a couple of yards of it should fall during the night, entombing him in a mass of lime, hair, and whitewash, and robbing the stage of one of its fairest flowers.

The floor is covered with a cheap and musty woollen carpet so full of dust that one step on it throws a person into a violent fit of sneezing. It is lighted by one of those infamous abominations of modern architecture, a dormer window, looking out of which gives a man a feeling that he is in States Prison for life. There is an old-fashioned air-tight stove in the room, in which are carefully arranged shavings and kindling wood ready to be ignited. Here at last, thinks the unsophisticated one, is an indication of attention to the comfort of guests; but oh, my brethren, be not too fresh and premature; touch not a single match, for, after you have gone to the hall at night, they will enter your room with a pass-key, and if they find one small chip that is charred just the least little bit, they will charge you fifty cents extra for fire.

There is a small table with its top covered with candle-grease and kerosene stains. There are only five lamps in the house, but sometimes, when there are no "drummers" stopping there, they let an actor have a lamp: this accounts for the oil spots. There is one drawer in this table, and it contains a lot of half-burned matches, the butt of a cigar, an old wash list, and a dirty linen collar. The water pitcher has no handle, and the snout is broken in such a manner that when

you try to pour the water into the bowl, it is liable to take an unexpected course, and land in your satchel over in the corner. The soap-dish is away on a vacation, and the soap has gone with it.

Over the wash-stand hangs a mirror with a crack its entire length; and a nervous man glancing into it is liable to get the impression that some one has maliciously and stealthily struck him in the head with a hatchet, and split him from crown to sole. The chambermaid has left either by accident or design a small rag, and in the absence of anything of a similar nature, it is reasonable to suppose it was intended for a towel.

The bed is made of a coarse sack filled with husks, in the centre of which is placed a large section of corn-stalk, and the latter is so arranged by a wise providence that no matter in what position a person lies, it is sure to press forcibly against some portion of the anatomy. This bag of dry and withered vegetation is laid across a framework of slats, whose utility is extremely doubtful, as they exhibit a perverse and depraved inclination to drop out at the least expected moments, thereby doubling the occupant up like a jack-knife.

An old army blanket filled with holes to entangle the pedal extremities of the unwary; a sheet that hasn't been changed since the last man slept there, he, evidently, having been a coal miner; and a pair of pillows, each stuffed with the feathers of a single canary bird, complete the outfit of this "balmy couch" on which tired humanity is expected to successfully woo the goddess of sleep, while the rats are having a political demonstration and a torchlight procession in the

walls, and the festive mosquito is singing sweet lullabys before commencing his work of assassination.

The weary Thespian looks it over, and on general principle makes the usual "kick," knowing, however, that it will do no good: he gets the stereotyped reply, "If you don't like it, you can go somewhere else;" not very encouraging, certainly, when it is the only hotel in town. Having entered his protest and recorded his opinion, he feels that he has done his duty; and resigning himself to his fate, he drops down into the husks; and after a series of fitful naps, haunted by all sorts of horrible visions, is just about dropping off into a sound slumber, when, crash! bang! goes the gong again, announcing that dinner is ready.

This meal is a repetition of the breakfast, with the exception that the guests have been re-enforced by several commercial men who are evidently "star boarders," as they have a clean table-cover, a dish of fruit, and several other dishes which do not appear on the other table. Here is an opportunity to indulge in another growl, but it proves to be barren of any beneficial results, and only serves to still farther widen the gulf between "mine host" and the "darned play actors."

After dinner the boys want to smoke, and there is considerable hustling around for matches. The landlord will give you but one at a time; and if that goes out, the luckless man who asks for another is made to feel that he is guilty of a piece of reckless extravagance. Then there is a vain hunt for a shoe-brush and a whisk broom, mingled with requests for pen and ink, envelopes and writing-paper, the latter of which is doled out one sheet at a time.

The parlor door has been locked to prevent the ladies of the company stealing the piano or the furniture, and they are obliged to take refuge in their rooms. The office chairs are all taken up by the village loafers, and in sheer desperation the gentlemen stroll over to the hall, where they while away the long dreary afternoon.

As supper-time approaches, it suddenly occurs to the landlord and the entire executive force of the ranch, that they would like to go to the show, and immediately a most bewildering transformation takes place. In the twinkling of an eye the house develops into a model showman's home, with all the conveniences and courtesies so dear to the heart of the susceptible Bohemian. Even the leading lady's dog, whose life has been made miserable during the day, by kicks, curses, and abuse generally, is benefited by this strange and sudden revulsion of feeling; the porter pats him on the head, and calls him "good doggie," and the cook whistles him into the kitchen, where he is filled so full of meat he is unable to walk, and has to be carried upstairs on a coal shovel; the parlor doors are thrown wide open; the loafers are driven out of the office chairs; shoe-brushes, matches, writing-paper, etc., appear as if by magic, and the manager is informed that if he would like supper a half hour earlier he can have it just as well as not.

Here, as can easily be seen, is an excellent opportunity for retaliation, and it is an opportunity which the members of any other profession under the sun would immediately take full advantage of. But malice is something that does not enter into the composition

of the average showman: he sheds abuse and ill-treatment as a duck sheds water, and it is a notorious fact, capable of the most emphatic demonstration, that nine out of every ten men and women connected with the stage will go out of their way to find excuses for the conduct of evilly-disposed people; and in this case, as in all others, the neglect and the insults of the day are at once forgotten, or at least condoned at the first appearance of better usage.

"I don't know as we can blame him much after all," says the comedian: "there are so many troupes traveling through the country who abuse hospitality, and make themselves odious, that they disgrace the whole profession, and I suppose the hotel men get to look upon us all as of the same ilk, and act accordingly.

This excuse, weak and illogical though it may be, is prompted by clear good-nature, and a forgiving spirit, and is acquiesced in by everybody: consequently, the landlord, his whole family, and all the servants from cook to hostler, get "comps," and, when the show is over, they criticise it unmercifully, condemn the performance throughout, and submit that their own "Harmony Dramatic Club" could do fifty per cent better themselves.

And so it happens that when the tired workers return to the hotel, they find there has been another change, and matters have returned to their normal condition: they are again looked upon with suspicion, this time not unmingled with contempt, and, disheartened and discouraged, they seize their tallow dips, and sadly climb skywards to their respective husk bags, where they ruminate on "man's inhumanity to man,"

in general, and the "cussedness" of this hotel in particular.

When the train leaves the next morning it carries a thoroughly mad and disgusted party, and they vow that if unkind fate ever compels them to visit that town again, they will make that landlord so "sick" that he will wish he had never been born. But then, that is a harmless threat, for, in the misery of the next stand, they have forgotten the previous one before night, and next season they will be found going over the same route, enjoying the same old experiences, and making the same old resolve.

I am well aware that, to the non-professional, this will appear like a fancy sketch, but I appeal to my brother showmen to bear me out in my assertion, that the duplicates of this hotel and this landlord exist in plentiful numbers in every State in the Union to-day.

There is a bright side to the picture, of course, and I am glad to say that its appearance in various parts of the country is yearly growing more frequent.

Here is the bright side, —

A bluff, hearty, cheery-faced landlord, who meets you at the train with a pleasant word of greeting.

Willing porters who seize the heavy satchels, without waiting to be asked.

A big roomy hotel, the first glimpse of which is somehow like a vision of home.

A matronly landlady who receives the show folks at the door, and extends to them the freedom of the house.

Servants who anticipate every want, and evidently take pleasure and pride in catering to your desires.

Large, airy rooms, scrupulously neat and clean, into which you are ushered without a moment's delay.

A spacious parlor with an open piano, and books and papers scattered everywhere.

A comfortable office, having, as its most conspicuous article of furniture, a placard bearing this inscription: "This apartment is for the use of the guests of this house exclusively — All others will govern themselves accordingly."

A wide shady veranda, thickly strewn with rustic chairs.

And a bewildering profusion of pens, ink, paper, envelopes, shoe-brushes, and whisk brooms, all of which are yours without the asking.

All through the day you are the recipient of a thousand little graceful attentions, insignificant individually, but when taken collectively, showing a careful consideration for your comfort that is refreshing: you have the satisfaction, too, of knowing that it is all done freely and without the expectation of perquisites, for when night comes, and the manager asks the landlord if he would like some tickets for his family, he answers that he has bought tickets for himself, but, if he (the manager) has a mind to give the table girls two or three, they would be very much appreciated.

After the show, there is a little lunch for everybody, followed by a night of sound, peaceful slumber in the luxurious beds, and, when the time for departure arrives, there is a general feeling of regret, and, no matter how bad the business may have been, that town is surely booked for next season, solely on account of the hotel.

Oh! Courtesy, properly invested, invariably pays a big dividend, and showmen are fully as good advertising mediums as commercial men.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE winter of 1880-81 will long be remembered as the severest known for years. Intensely cold weather and furious storms prevailed in all parts of the country, and snow blockades were of frequent occurrence. The North-west was, of course, particularly affected by this state of affairs, and in this section I was travelling during the entire season. Nothing like it had ever been known, even in this extremely rigorous climate; the railroads were unprepared to meet any such emergency, and the absence of snow sheds in many important places caused the deep cuts to fill, even with an ordinary storm, and this freezing, and being added to constantly, would soon make a solid bank, through which it was impossible for the trains to make a passage.

Time and again we were "snowed in" and compelled to miss our dates, and for the space of nearly three months our route was so completely disarranged that it was impossible to get mail, or to ascertain where we were to appear two days in advance.

To add to the discomfort the cold was positively frightful, and was the cause of much suffering, many deaths, and the loss of large numbers of cattle who perished on the open prairies. During this period we made a band parade one day in a small village on the

Dakota side of the Red River, when the thermometer actually registered fifty two degrees below zero, although, the atmosphere being so extremely dry on account of the high altitude, it really did not seem any colder than it would have at twenty degrees in the East. Parading under these circumstances was always a harassing affair, for we could seldom play more than four or five measures before some of the lead horns would freeze solid, necessitating a hasty retreat into some neighboring store to thaw out; and in Owatonna, Minn., we started 'n one night in front of the hall to play a band selection with twelve mouth-pieces, and finished it with the bass drum and tuba.

One Monday morning late in February, 1881, we arrived at Fox Lake, Wis., reaching the town over a little one-horse branch railroad built from the main line to accommodate the villagers. It had been snowing since the previous evening, and it was with the greatest difficulty that we got there at all.

Our next stand was to be Beaver Dam, and as it was forty miles from Fox Lake by rail and only ten by highway, the agent had made a contract with a livery man to take the party over on Tuesday with teams. It was early apparent to every one that a long storm had commenced, and as Fox Lake was simply a small hamlet, while Beaver Dam was quite an important manufacturing town, our manager was extremely anxious to reach the latter place, for if we had got to be "snowed in anywhere, it would be better to meet that fate where there was sufficient population to warrant us in giving extra entertainments with a view to at least making our expenses.

All day long and all night the snow fell unceasingly, and when morning dawned was still coming down in large flakes. The party who held the contract to transport us was a trifle dubious as to the success of the undertaking, but signified his willingness to make the attempt, providing every man in the company would take a shovel and promise to use it if necessary. To this we readily consented, and at seven A.M. we started out with two teams for the people and two for the baggage, and the snow falling so thickly that objects could scarcely be distinguished one rod distant.

The experiences of that terrible drive will forever remain fresh in my memory, but it is almost impossible for me to describe the many obstacles we encountered. The first two miles of our route lay through an open country, and the highway being exposed to the fierce winds common to that section, was comparatively free from snow, and we began to congratulate ourselves that matters were not going to be so very bad after all, when we reached a point where the road had been cut through a side hill, making a deep gully over one mile in width into which the snow had drifted until it was ten feet in depth from end to end. Here a consultation was held, and the teamsters strenuously advocated turning back, in which they were supported by the entire company with the exception of the manager, who insisted that we should proceed at all hazards. Accordingly we were all ordered to seize shovels and set to work.

The cold, as I have said, was intense, and our hands, being unaccustomed to such work, soon became blistered to that degree that the pain was nearly unbear-

able; still we worked on as best we could, and at the expiration of nearly three hours managed to force the horses through the cut. We were by this time thoroughly benumbed, wet to the skin, tired, hungry, and discouraged, and I really think we should have mutinied and insisted upon turning back, had it not been for the fact that the fast-falling snow obliterated the pathway nearly as fast as we made it, rendering it fully as easy to go forward as to retreat.

Taking our places in the sleighs we started again, and had gone probably about half a mile, when the driver of the conveyance in which I happened to be riding in attempting to avoid a large drift turned out a trifle too far, and over went the whole outfit into ten feet of the "beautiful," a confused and almost inextricable jumble of horses, harness, sleigh, robes, and people. Very fortunately the animals, after struggling to their feet, remained comparatively quiet, otherwise some of us would have been severely injured. We were far from any habitation, and the other teams having gone on ahead, could get no assistance from them; but after an hour of hard labor and the exercise of all sorts of ingenuity, we succeeded in patching up things sufficiently to enable us to proceed.

About two miles farther on we came up with the occupants of the other sleigh, and found them busily engaged in trying to make an opening through another large snow bank, and, exhausted as we were, we were obliged to take our shovels and join in their efforts.

And thus that long, dreary, dismal day passed. Hour after hour did we stand up to our waists in snow, shovelling for dear life, with the big flakes as large as a

man's hand falling incessantly, and, as night approached, increasing in quantity and thickness. Three different times during the day we were upset completely, and each time the harnesses were broken in one or more places, until through frequent repairs, with straps, ropes, nails, string, and whatever could be made serviceable for the purpose, they presented a most remarkable and dilapidated appearance. The ladies of course suffered the worst, for, not being able to take advantage of the exercise gained by shovelling, they gradually became chilled to the bone, and at one time it was necessary to build a large fire in the woods to keep them from freezing.

Not dreaming of what we were to pass through, we had started totally unprepared for this severe experience, and were without food or stimulants of any kind.

The section of country through which we passed was very sparsely settled, and there had been no opportunity to obtain anything to eat, and as the afternoon wore on, and the pangs of hunger began to be felt more forcibly every moment, we gladly welcomed the sight of a small clearing in the forest, in the centre of which stood one of those peculiar mud houses such as the Polanders usually build when they first settle in the Western country. Here was an opportunity to obtain something which would at least satisfy the cravings of our empty stomachs, and we jumped from the sleigh and rushed forward eagerly.

We found the hut was occupied only by two middle-aged females, who were unable to speak a word of English, and who evidently regarded us with suspicion, for, after holding the door open for a few moments,

while we vainly endeavored to explain our wants, they unceremoniously slammed it in our faces and fastened it from the inside.

Here was a dilemma. No other habitation in sight, and every one half-famished.

At this juncture the second sleigh arrived, and in this was our first violinist, Koswosky, a Bohemian Dutchman, who spoke a half-dozen of those mixed languages peculiar to Germany and her allied countries. Upon explaining matters to him he volunteered to use his efforts to convince them that we were neither highwaymen nor gypsies; with this end in view he began shouting all sorts of outlandish gibberish through the keyhole, and, after repeated attempts, finally succeeded in striking a dialect that the women could understand. He then explained the situation to them, and they at once opened the door, made us welcome, and furnished us with all the food desired, for which they refused to accept payment of any kind.

I verily believe that this break in the day's experience was the means of saving the lives of some of our party, for the horses were rapidly becoming exhausted, and had this opportunity to feed them not occurred as it did they would have undoubtedly given out on the road and compelled us to tramp blindly across an unknown country in a wilderness of snow. As it was, we all got thoroughly warm, dried our clothing, and, with hunger appeased, we started out in much brighter spirits. But still the snow fell with blinding thickness, and still those terrible drifts were encountered through which we had to force our way by constant use of the shovels, and it was nine o'clock in the evening before

he lights of Beaver Dam at last fell upon our vision: and when we drove up in front of the hotel, the ladies of the company were so completely exhausted that they had to be lifted bodily from the sleighs, and carried to their rooms.

For eight days we were obliged to remain in this town, and for five days of the time the snow fell without a moment's cessation. Showmen who were in that section at the time will readily recall the event. Every avenue of exit from the different towns and cities was most effectually closed. Telegraph wires were down, rendering communication with the outside world impossible. A great deal of inconvenience and in many cases positive suffering was caused by a scarcity of provisions: many of the country merchants had but a meagre supply of the necessaries of life in their stores, and this being soon exhausted, it was impossible to get more. In our own case we were obliged to do without butter, milk, vegetables, or country produce of any sort for four days.

We finally managed to get away with teams, and struggled along for a while, playing towns a week behind our dates, losing a night here and a night there, sometimes on the railroad and sometimes on the highway, with everything in a bewildering state of positive uncertainty. For ten days it was absolutely impossible to find our agent, and when we did at last succeed in locating him, he was two hundred miles away, without funds and unable to move in any direction. It was fully two months before we got our route straightened out, and began to move along in our normal condition once more. Our experience, however, was only that of

many others, and the winter of 1880-81 will always be known as the hardest season for show people that the north-western country, in particular, has ever known.

CHAPTER XVIII.

IT frequently happens that show people are made to suffer all sorts of trouble and annoyance at the hands of roughs and evil-disposed persons, whose sole object seems to be to harass and inconvenience the members of a profession against which they appear to have a deep-seated, but entirely uncalled-for, antipathy. Exactly why this should be so is a question that I have never heard answered satisfactorily; but certain it is that the feeling exists (although in a much less intensified degree than formerly), and has been the cause of many sad casualties, the majority of which furnish the most outrageous record of fiendish malignity, inhuman brutality, and disgraceful conduct that has ever blotted the pages of history.

My life has been remarkably free from these disagreeable experiences, and I am happy to say that I have travelled extensively in thirty States and territories of this country in pursuit of my profession, and so far as audiences taken collectively are concerned, with one exception only, have always and invariably been treated with the utmost courtesy and respect.

That exception occurred in Griffin, Ga., and although it resulted in nothing of a particularly serious nature, it was still the cause of considerable damage, and for

three hours kept our little party in a perfect frenzy of fear and excitement ; and looking back to it at this late day, it really does seem almost a miracle that some one was not killed outright, or at least badly injured, during the disreputable proceedings of that long disagreeable evening.

It appeared that at the time of our visit the town was, and had for some time been, under an extremely loose system of government, its affairs being in the hands of a ring of politicians who ran matters as they pleased, and paid but little attention to the desires of the people at large.

The wife of our manager had charge of the door on this particular evening, and among the first to present themselves for admission were two rough-looking individuals, who, announcing themselves as special police officers and displaying plain tin stars as badges, were allowed to pass in. Very shortly two more came up, and then two more, and so it continued, until finally there were twelve of them in the hall.

By this time the lady had begun to suspect that all was not as it should be, and when the next lot of three arrived she refused to admit them without tickets, remarking that she did not think it necessary to pass in every citizen of the town simply because he happened to wear a tin star. This angered them, and they departed vowing vengeance, and, as we learned afterward, went directly to the marshal of the town, to whom they reported, and who, as we were credibly informed, told them they might "go over to the hall and raise all the h——l they wanted to," a permission which they were not slow in acting upon.

On their way back they fell in with a young man of the town, a member of a respectable family, but who happened to be under the influence of liquor at the time, and they at once enlisted him in their service, proposing to use him as a cat's paw. They purchased tickets at the office, and came up-stairs talking loudly and making all the noise possible. I was on the stage doing a specialty at the time, and, taking a stand at the back of the hall, they at once proceeded to annoy me in every conceivable way.

Finally, the afore-mentioned young man made some sort of a remark that angered me, and I (in professional parlance), "got back at him," thinking that possibly it might have the effect of silencing him; on the contrary, it appeared to be exactly what he desired, for walking down the aisle he reached down in his pocket for a revolver with the evident intention of settling me there and then. He was seized, however, by some young gentlemen, and rushed out of the hall before he could do any damage, and the entire body of "special officers" shortly followed him. Then commenced one of the most exciting evenings through which it has ever been my misfortune to pass.

The hall was located upon the second floor of a large building situated in the middle of an open lot, and as soon as these worthies were fairly on the outside, they began a perfect fusillade of bricks, stones, and other missiles with the evident intention of injuring us or breaking up the performance. During the entire evening there was a continual crashing of glass, varied occasionally by a dull thud as some heavy object struck the side of the building with terrific force. Windows.

sashes, and blinds were ruined, and the ruffians also threw stones at the main door until they succeeded in breaking in the panels.

Several times during the performance our ladies fainted with fright, and every time they appeared on the stage were obliged to do so with the tears streaming down their cheeks; but we were determined to go through the programme, and did so.

In each dressing-room was a window, which we had screened with common white cloth, and every time a shadow was cast against these improvised curtains it was a signal for a missile of some sort to come crashing through, so that we were in constant danger from the flying glass.

Finally, during the closing farce, we had reached a point where the soubrette and myself had a long scene, during which we were seated side by side on the stage. We were struggling along with our lines in the best manner possible under the circumstances, when suddenly a brick came whizzing through the rear window, passed between us in close proximity to our heads, shot out over the orchestra, and struck the editor of the local paper on the ankle, injuring him quite severely.

By this time the audience were getting nearly as nervous and panicky as ourselves, and we hurried through the remainder of the entertainment rapidly. The moment it was over and the people began to leave the hall, the cowardly rascals sneaked off and concealed themselves. By the better portion of the citizens we were treated with the greatest consideration, and received many assurances of their sympathy; and several elegantly dressed ladies went into the dressing-

rooms and endeavored to calm the female portion of our party, who had become decidedly hysterical.

Thus ended the most thoroughly disagreeable experience of my life in the show business: and, singularly enough, it proved to be a blessing in disguise in more ways than one. The minority party of the town made a campaign issue of the incident, and, as we were informed later, carried the next local election by a large majority; while for our side the town paper published a full and complete account of the affair, the *Associated Press* carried it to all the principal Southern papers, including the *Atlanta Constitution*, and, as a consequence, we got such an amount of free advertising in that section of country, that our business at once increased, and for nearly two months amounted to a perfect boom. Advertising of that description, however, although it may be commended on the score of cheapness, has disadvantages which I fear will never allow it to attain a very great degree of popularity.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE thousand and one amusing expressions emanating from the natives when a show is in town furnishes a never-failing source of merriment to the players.

In the little town of Iuka, Miss., I was approached by a long, lank individual, who introduced himself as a teacher of dancing. He informed me he was going to give a social dance the next evening in the town hall, and asked me if I would kindly announce

that fact to the audience "after our *services* were over."

In a little hall in a North Carolina town we gave an entertainment on a stage about the size of an ordinary dining-room table; and after the performance an old negro woman who was present was asked how she liked it, and replied that she didn't think much of it, "for they didn't have no hosses at all."

Many and curious are the appellations conferred upon the advance agent by the country people. I have heard that worthy designated by some of the strangest of titles, such as "forerunner," "head man," "bill-poster," and "cavasser." All sorts of charges are laid at his door, and he is bitterly calumniated by all parties. On every side can be heard "the agent said this," and "the agent said that;" "the agent said you would be here for breakfast sure," from the landlord who knows perfectly well that it would be a physical impossibility for you to get there till noon; "the agent said you had but four pieces of baggage," from the draymen who cannot help being aware of the fact that there are sixteen people in the party.

And they are very much astonished when you flash up the contract with their signatures attached, for nine men out of ten will sign an agreement with an advance agent without ever stopping to read or ascertain its provisions; this, too, by men who in the conduct of their every-day affairs are proverbially accurate and careful. The only reason that can be adduced for this is the dogged persistency with which they refuse to look upon the show business *as* a business, regarding it rather as a piece of sheer nonsense, and worthy of but

very little attention. I verily believe that a smart, gentlemanly appearing agent could go through this country from one end to the other and obtain *bona fide* signatures to deeds for valuable pieces of property, by taking a mean advantage of this strange weakness, or ignorance, or whatever you may choose to call it.

I don't suppose there is a travelling show on earth that ever struck a town when the conditions were entirely favorable for good business. There is always and invariably something the matter; and the same old refrain with its interminable variations is dimmed into your ears daily,—

"You've struck us on rather a poor night, for the mills don't settle till next Tuesday."

"You'd had a good house to-night, only the Dorcas Society meets over to Deacon Perkins's, and most everybody goes over there."

"Our people have been humbugged so much, it is hard work to make them turn out."

"I'm afraid you won't do very well to-night, for Squire Toothaker died yesterday, and, being a popular man round here, it'll be liable to keep a good many away."

And last, but by no means least, that horrible snare and delusion, that frightful nightmare of a heated imagination, that terrible maelstrom that has swept into its rapacious maw so many good men and true, the old reliable tale,—

"You ought to stopped two nights: everybody was tickled to death, and if you only stay to-morrow night, the hall won't begin to hold them."

How many managers have followed this advice with

the inevitable consequence of being obliged to walk to the next stand, the angels in heaven only know, and they won't tell.

Then there is the aged granger who usually puts in an appearance before you have been an hour in the town. He engages you in a conversation which gradually leads up to the following piece of information:—

“We've got a feller here that you folks ought to have with your show. He's one of the comicklest cusses you ever see in your life. He takes off a nigger in first-class shape, and you jest ought to hear him play the clappers. Everybody says he acts out the Yankee jest as good as Josh Whitcomb. I don't suppose you could get him to go with you, though, for he's got a darned good job here in the sawmill, and you probably couldn't afford to pay him wages enough.”

You go into the village barber-shop, and after you are laid out in the chair and covered with lather so that it is impossible for you to escape, the tonsorial artist opens on you. His first question is,—

“Do you belong to this show that's in town?”

You attempt to reply in the affirmative, and narrowly escape swallowing the shaving-brush, and the fiend continues:—

“Well, I thought so when you come in. It's funny, but somehow I can always tell a play-actor the minute I see him. Did ever you happen to run across Billy Peters in your travels? He's a banjo-player and piper. I didn't know but what you might have seen him. I hain't heard nothing of him for two years, and I'd like to know what's become of him.”

And then he goes on to tell you what a “rotten”

town it is, and how mean the people are, and that it is too dead for him, and that he's only been there six months, and that he wouldn't stay there two months longer for the whole place, and labors in every possible way to impress upon your mind the fact that he has always been used to the excitement of city life, and is really a pretty tough kind of a character.

Then he wipes the blood off your face, puts some rancid grease on your hair before you can prevent it, and calmly asks you if you've got a "comp" in your pocket: and you escape from the den in a frame of mind bordering on insanity, which can only be relieved by going back to the hotel and informing the other boys that you have struck the finest barber you ever saw in a country town.

CHAPTER XX.

THE wonderful changes that have taken place in the last decade, in the moral and social status of the amusement profession, as regards its relation to civilization cannot fail to be extremely gratifying to any one who has the interests of a much-abused calling at heart. The old-time prejudice against actors is heard of nowadays only in obscure localities, or from the lips of a certain class of clergymen, who, conscious of their inability to achieve prominence by legitimate methods, resort to a bitter and libellous condemnation of their fellow-man, in order to satisfy their morbid craving for notoriety.

Since the beginning of time the people of all ages have clamored for amusement; it is one of the strongest and most uncontrollable elements in human nature; it is a part of our beings for which we are in no way responsible. It asserts itself in the creeping infant whose tiny fingers try to catch the shifting sunbeams on the nursery floor, and when that same infant has grown to manhood or womanhood, and is surrounded by the cares and responsibilities of maturer years, the labors of the day are wonderfully lightened by the prospect of a few hours' recreation in view.

And in Heaven's name will some one tell me wherein lies the harm of catering to this most natural instinct?

Did you ever see a crowd of country people around a circus canvas? And do you mean to tell me that the innocent enjoyment they derive from "circus day" amounts to nothing?

God bless you, friends, it does them more good than all the sermons they will hear in the next six months. I have no quarrel with religion. It is the safeguard of humanity; without it the world could not exist. But we are not a nation of extremists. Intemperance in worship is equally as bad as intemperance in amusement. The church and the stage both have their work to perform, and one is of as great and as lasting benefit as the other.

There are bad men and bad women in the profession, very, very many of them. But does that fact warrant you in condemning their avocation? Ah! but you say it is the business that demoralizes them. How about the church? Statistics are in existence to show that

some of the most damnable and diabolical crimes on the calendar have been committed by pulpit occupants. What demoralizes them, pray? Surely you wouldn't abolish the word of God because some of His servants prove unfaithful? Nonsense! The time is coming, and I hope it is not far distant, when every man will be judged according to his individual merits or failings, and if he is found wanting, his punishment will not be extended to his humble and honest brother, simply because he happens to be using the same tools with which to earn his daily bread.

"Faith, Hope, and Charity," "the greatest of these is Charity," is the sweet assurance of Holy Writ, and I challenge any profession, trade, or calling under the broad sunlight of heaven (and I don't except the Church) to show such a record of good works in this direction as can be credited to this noble and much-abused class of people.

The members of the profession have themselves been largely responsible for the senseless antipathy and bitter prejudices displayed toward them by the world at large. Essentially Bohemian in all their tastes, they have been careless of public opinion, and for years allowed themselves to be abused and slandered in the most disgraceful manner without uttering a word in their own defence: indeed, so widespread and deep rooted had the evil become, that the poor Thespian grew to look upon it as the natural order of things, and so they moved on through life, living among their fellow-men, yet having nothing in common with them, and, if the truth were told, just a little proud of the fact that they were regarded as outcasts.

But all this has changed. The spirit of enlightenment, which for half a century had been slowly and laboriously brushing away the dust-laden cobwebs of narrow-minded superstition, suddenly turned its attention to our profession; some of our ablest and most talented men and women awoke to the fact that they were ostracized without cause, and no sooner had the scales fallen from their eyes than they began to make a most vigorous protest.

An almost complete revolution of sentiment in our favor has been the result: in every large city in the land to-day, the representative of the stage has become a recognized quantity in the intricate social problem, and some of the deepest thinkers of the age have placed upon record their candid opinion that the mere fact of a man being an actor does not necessarily imply that contact with him means hopeless contamination.

Let the good work go on. It is the dawn of a new era.

