

Sheba Blake Publishing Corp.

S^A*NT* OF ROGUES

Frank Barrett



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A **SET** OF ROGUES

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FRANK BARRETT

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Frank Barrett asserts the moral right to be identified as the author of this work.

Sheba Blake Publishing Corp.

2288 Crossrail Dr

Atlanta, GA 30349

support@shebablake.com

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Chapter I



O*f my companions and our adversities, and in particular from our getting into the stocks at Tottenham Cross to our being robbed at Edmonton.*

There being no plays to be acted at the “Red Bull,” because of the Plague, and the players all cast adrift for want of employment, certain of us, to wit, Jack Dawson and his daughter Moll, Ned Herring, and myself, clubbed our monies together to buy a store of dresses, painted cloths, and the like, with a cart and horse to carry them, and thus provided set forth to travel the country and turn an honest penny, in those parts where the terror of pestilence had not yet turned men’s stomachs against the pleasures of life. And here, at our setting out, let me show what kind of company we were. First, then, for our master, Jack Dawson, who on no occasion was to be given a second place; he was a hale, jolly fellow, who would eat a pound of beef for his breakfast (when he could get it), and make nothing of half a gallon of ale therewith,—a very masterful man, but kindly withal, and pleasant to look at when not contraried, with never a line of care in his face, though turned of fifty. He played our humorous parts, but he had a sweet voice for singing of ditties, and could fetch a tear as readily as a laugh, and he was also exceeding nimble at a dance, which was the strangest thing in the world, considering his great girth. Wife he had none, but Moll Dawson was his daughter, who was a most sprightly, merry little wench, but no miracle for beauty, being neither child nor woman at this time; surprisingly thin, as if her frame had grown out of proportion with her

flesh, so that her body looked all arms and legs, and her head all mouth and eyes, with a great towzled mass of chestnut hair, which (off the stage) was as often as not half tumbled over her shoulder. But a quicker little baggage at mimicry (she would play any part, from an urchin of ten to a crone of fourscore), or a livelier at dancing of Brantles or the single Coranto never was, I do think, and as merry as a grig. Of Ned Herring I need only here say that he was the most tearing villain imaginable on the stage, and off it the most civil-spoken, honest-seeming young gentleman. Nor need I trouble to give a very lengthy description of myself; what my character was will appear hereafter, and as for my looks, the less I say about them, the better. Being something of a scholar and a poet, I had nearly died of starvation, when Jack Dawson gave me a footing on the stage, where I would play the part of a hero in one act, a lacquey in the second, and a merry Andrew in the third, scraping a tune on my fiddle to fill up the intermedios.

We had designed to return to London as soon as the Plague abated, unless we were favoured with extraordinary good fortune, and so, when we heard that the sickness was certainly past, and the citizens recovering of their panic, we (being by this time heartily sick of our venture, which at the best gave us but beggarly recompense) set about to retrace our steps with cheerful expectations of better times. But coming to Oxford, we there learned that a prodigious fire had burnt all London down, from the Tower to Ludgate, so that if we were there, we should find no house to play in. This lay us flat in our hopes, and set us again to our vagabond enterprise; and so for six months more we scoured the country in a most miserable plight, the roads being exceedingly foul, and folks more humoured of nights to drowse in their chimnies than to sit in a draughty barn and witness our performances; and then, about the middle of February we, in a kind of desperation, got back again

to London, only to find that we must go forth again, the town still lying in ruins, and no one disposed to any kind of amusement, except in high places, where such actors as we were held in contempt. So we, with our hearts in our boots, as one may say, set out again to seek our fortunes on the Cambridge road, and here, with no better luck than elsewhere, for at Tottenham Cross we had the mischance to set fire to the barn wherein we were playing, by a candle falling in some loose straw, whereby we did injury to the extent of some shilling or two, for which the farmer would have us pay a pound, and Jack Dawson stoutly refusing to satisfy his demand he sends for the constable, who locks us all up in the cage that night, to take us before the magistrate in the morning. And we found to our cost that this magistrate had as little justice as mercy in his composition; for though he lent a patient ear to the farmer's case, he would not listen to Jack Dawson's argument, which was good enough, being to the effect that we had not as much as a pound amongst us, and that he would rather be hanged than pay it if he had; and when Ned Herring (seeing the kind of Puritanical fellow he was) urged that, since the damage was not done by any design of ours, it must be regarded as a visitation of Providence, he says: "Very good. If it be the will of Providence that one should be scourged, I take it as the Divine purpose that I should finish the business by scourging the other"; and therewith he orders the constable to take what money we have from our pockets and clap us in the stocks till sundown for payment of the difference. So in the stocks we three poor men were stuck for six mortal hours, which was a wicked, cruel thing indeed, with the wind blowing a sort of rainy snow about our ears; and there I do think we must have perished of cold and vexation but that our little Moll brought us a sheet for a cover, and tired not in giving us kind words of comfort.

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

Coming at dusk to Edmonton, and finding a fine new inn there, called the "Bell," Jack Dawson leads the cart into the yard, we following without a word of demur, and, after putting up our trap, into the warm parlour we go, and call for supper as boldly as you please. Then, when we had eaten and drunk till we could no more, all to bed like princes, which, after a night in the cage and a day in the stocks, did seem like a very paradise. But how we were to pay for this entertainment not one of us knew, nor did we greatly care, being made quite reckless by our necessities. It was the next morning, when we met together at breakfast, that our faces betrayed some compunctions; but these did not prevent us eating prodigiously. "For," whispers Ned Herring, "if we are to be hanged, it may as well be for a sheep as a lamb." However, Jack Dawson, getting on the right side of the landlord, who seemed a very honest, decent man for an innkeeper, agreed with him that we should give a performance that night in a cart-shed very proper to our purpose, giving him half of our taking in payment

of our entertainment. This did Jack, thinking from our late ill-luck we should get at the most a dozen people in the sixpenny benches, and a score standing at twopence a head. But it turned out, as the cunning landlord had foreseen, that our hanger was packed close to the very door, in consequence of great numbers coming to the town in the afternoon to see a bull baited, so that when Jack Dawson closed the doors and came behind our scene to dress for his part, he told us he had as good as five pounds in his pocket. With that to cheer us we played our tragedy of "The Broken Heart" very merrily, and after that, changing our dresses in a twinkling, Jack Dawson, disguised as a wild man, and Moll as a wood nymph, came on to the stage to dance a pastoral, whilst I, in the fashion of a satyr, stood on one side plying the fiddle to their footing. Then, all being done, Jack thanks the company for their indulgence, and bids 'em good-night.

And now, before all the company are yet out of the place, and while Jack Dawson is wiping the sweat from his face, comes the landlord, and asks pretty bluntly to be paid his share of our earnings.

"Well," says Jack, in a huff, "I see no reason for any such haste; but if you will give me time to put on my breeches, you shall be paid all the same." And therewith he takes down his trunks from the nail where they hung. And first giving them a doubtful shake, as seeming lighter than he expected, and hearing no chink of money, he thrusts his hand into one pocket, and then into the other, and cries in dismay: "Heaven's mercy upon us; we are robbed! Every penny of our money is gone!"

"Can you think of nothing better than such an idle story as that?" says the landlord. "There hath been none behind this sheet but yourselves all the night."

We could make no reply to this, but stood gaping at each other in a maze for some seconds; then Jack Dawson, recovering his wits, turns him round,

and looking about, cries: "Why, where's Ned Herring?"

"If you mean him as was killed in your play," says the landlord, "I'll answer for it he's not far off; for, to my knowledge, he was in the house drinking with a man while you were a-dancing of your antics like a fool. And I only hope you may be as honest a man as he, for he paid for his liquor like a gentleman."

That settled the question, for we knew the constable had left never a penny in his pocket when he clapt us in the stocks.

"Well," says Jack, "he has our money, as you may prove by searching us, and if you have faith in him 'tis all as one, and you may rest easy for your reckoning being paid against his return."

The landlord went off, vowing he would take the law of us if he were not paid by the morning; and we, as soon as we had shuffled on our clothes, away to hunt for Ned, thinking that maybe he had made off with the money to avoid paying half to the landlord, and hoping always that, though he might play the rogue with him, he would deal honestly by us. But we could find no trace of him, though we visited every alehouse in the town, and so back we go, crestfallen, to the Bell, to beg the innkeeper to give us a night's lodging and a crust of bread on the speculation that Ned would come back and settle our accounts; but he would not listen to our prayers, and so, hungry and thirsty, and miserable beyond expression, we were fain to make up with a loft over the stables, where, thanks to a good store of sweet hay, we soon forgot our troubles in sleep, but not before we had concerted to get away in the morning betimes to escape another day in the stocks.

Accordingly, before the break of day, we were afoot, and after noiselessly packing our effects in the cart in the misty grey light, Jack Dawson goes in the stable to harness our nag, while I as silently take down the heavy bar that fastened the yard gate. But while I was yet fumbling at the bolts, and all of a

shake for fear of being caught in the act, Jack Dawson comes to me, with Moll holding of his hand, as she would when our troubles were great, and says in a tone of despair:

“Give over, Kit. We are all undone again. For our harness is stole, and there’s never another I can take in its place.”

While we were at this stumble, out comes our landlord to make sport of us. “Have you found your money yet, friends?” says he, with a sneer.

“No,” says Jack, savagely, “and our money is not all that we have lost, for some villain has filched our nag’s harness, and I warrant you know who he is.”

“Why, to be sure,” returns the other, “the same friend may have taken it who has gone astray with your other belongings; but, be that as it may, I’ll answer for it when your money is found your harness will be forthcoming, and not before.”

“Come, Master,” says I, “have you no more heart than to make merry at the mischances of three poor wretches such as we?”

“Aye,” says he, “when you can show that you deserve better treatment.”

“Done,” says Jack. “I’ll show you that as quickly as you please.” With that he whips off his cap, and flinging it on the ground, cries: “Off with your jacket, man, and let us prove by such means as Heaven has given all which is the honestest of us two.” And so he squares himself up to fight; but the innkeeper, though as big a man as he, being of a spongy constitution, showed no relish for this mode of argument, and turning his back on us with a shake of the head, said he was very well satisfied of his own honesty, and if we doubted it we could seek what satisfaction the law would give us, adding slyly, as he turned at the door, that he could recommend us a magistrate of his acquaintance, naming him who had set us in the stocks at Tottenham Cross.

The very hint of this put us again in a quake, and now, the snow beginning to fall pretty heavily, we went into the shed to cast about as to what on earth we should do next. There we sat, glum and silent, watching idly the big flakes of snow fluttering down from the leaden sky, for not one of us could imagine a way out of this hobble.

“Holy Mother!” cries Jack at length, springing up in a passion, “we cannot sit here and starve of cold and hunger. Cuddle up to my arm, Moll, and do you bring your fiddle, Kit, and let us try our luck a-begging in alehouses.”

And so we trudged out into the driving snow, that blinded us as we walked, bow our heads as we might, and tried one alehouse after the other, but all to no purpose, the parlours being empty because of the early hour, and the snow keeping folks within doors; only, about midday, some carters, who had pulled up at an inn, took pity on us, and gave us a mug of penny ale and half a loaf, and that was all the food we had the whole miserable day. Then at dusk, wet-footed and fagged out in mind and body, we trudged back to the Bell, thinking to get back into the loft and bury ourselves in the sweet hay for warmth and comfort. But coming hither, we found our nag turned out of the stable and the door locked, so that we were thrown quite into despair by the loss of this last poor hope, and poor Moll, turning her face away from us, burst out a-crying—she who all day had set us a brave example by her cheerful merry spirit.

Chapter II



O*f our first acquaintance with the Señor Don Sanchez del Castillo de Castelaña, and his brave entertaining of us.*

I was taking a turn or two outside the shed,—for the sight of Jack Dawson hugging poor Moll to his breast and trying to soothe her bodily misery with gentle words was more than I could bear,—when a drawer coming across from the inn told me that a gentleman in the Cherry room would have us come to him. I gave him a civil answer and carried this message to my friends. Moll, who had staunched her tears and was smiling piteously, though her sobs, like those of a child, still shook her thin frame, and her father both looked at me in blank doubt as fearing some trap for our further discomfiture.

“Nay,” says Jack, stoutly. “Fate can serve us no worse within doors than without, so let us in and face this gentleman, whoever he is.”

So in we go, and all sodden and bedrabbled as we were, went to follow the drawer upstairs, when the landlady cried out she would not have us go into her Cherry room in that pickle, to soil her best furniture and disgrace her house, and bade the fellow carry us into the kitchen to take off our cloaks and change our boots for slip-shoes, adding that if we had any respect for ourselves, we should trim our hair and wash the grime off our faces. So we enter the kitchen, nothing loath, where a couple of pullets browning on the spit, kettles bubbling on the fire, and a pasty drawing from the oven, filled the air with delicious odours that nearly drove us mad for envy; and to think that these good things

were to tempt the appetite of some one who never hungered, while we, famishing for want, had not even a crust to appease our cravings! But it was some comfort to plunge our blue, numbed fingers into a tub of hot water and feel the life blood creeping back into our hearts. The paint we had put on our cheeks the night before was streaked all over our faces by the snow, so that we did look the veriest scarecrows imaginable; but after washing our heads well and stroking our hair into order with a comb Mistress Cook lent us, we looked not so bad. And thus changed, and with dry shoes to our feet, we at length went upstairs, all full of wondering expectation, and were led into the Cherry room, which seemed to us a very palace, being lit with half a dozen candles (and they of wax) and filled with a warm glow by the blazing logs on the hearth reflected in the cherry hangings. And there in the midst was a table laid for supper with a wondrous white cloth, glasses to drink from, and silver forks all set out most bravely.

“His worship will be down ere long,” says the drawer, and with that he makes a pretence of building up the fire, being warned thereto very like by the landlady, with an eye to the safety of her silver.

“Can you tell me his worship’s name, friend?” I whispered, my mind turning at once to his worship of Tottenham Cross.

“Not I, were you to pay me,” says he. “’Tis that outlandish and uncommon. But for sure he is some great foreign grandee.”

He could tell us no more, so we stood there all together, wondering, till presently the door opens, and a tall, lean gentleman enters, with a high front, very finely dressed in linen stockings, a long-waisted coat, and embroidered waistcoat, and rich lace at his cuffs and throat. He wore no peruke, but his own hair, cut quite close to his head, with a pointed beard and a pair of long moustachios twisting up almost to his ears; but his appearance was the more

striking by reason of his beard and moustachios being quite black, while the hair on his head was white as silver. He had dark brows also, that overhung very rich black eyes; his nose was long and hooked, and his skin, which was of a very dark complexion, was closely lined with wrinkles about the eyes, while a deep furrow lay betwixt his brows. He carried his head very high, and was majestic and gracious in all his movements, not one of which (as it seemed to me) was made but of forethought and purpose. I should say his age was about sixty, though his step and carriage were of a younger man. To my eyes he appeared a very handsome and a pleasing, amiable gentleman. But, Lord, what can you conclude of a man at a single glance, when every line in his face (of which he had a score and more) has each its history of varying passions, known only to himself, and secret phases of his life!

He saluted us with a most noble bow, and dismissed the drawer with a word in an undertone. Then turning again to us, he said: "I had the pleasure of seeing you act last night, and dance," he adds with a slight inclination of his head to Moll. "Naturally, I wish to be better acquainted with you. Will it please you to dine with me?"

I could not have been more dumbfounded had an angel asked me to step into heaven; but Dawson was quick enough to say something.

"That will we," cries he, "and God bless your worship for taking pity on us, for I doubt not you have heard of our troubles."

The other bowed his head and set a chair at the end of the table for Moll, which she took with a pretty curtsy, but saying never a word, for glee did seem to choke us all. And being seated, she cast her eyes on the bread hungrily, as if she would fain begin at once, but she had the good manners to restrain herself. Then his worship (as we called him), having shown us the chairs on either side, seated himself last of all, at the head of the table, facing our Moll,

whom whenever he might without discourtesy, he regarded with most scrutinising glances from first to last. Then the door flinging open, two drawers brought in those same fat pullets we had seen browning before the fire, and also the pasty, with abundance of other good cheer, at which Moll, with a little cry of delight, whispers to me:

“‘Tis like a dream. Do speak to me, Kit, or I must think ‘twill all fade away presently and leave us in the snow.”

Then I, finding my tongue, begged his worship would pardon us if our manners were more uncouth than the society to which he was accustomed.

“Nay,” says Dawson, “Your worship will like us none the worse, I warrant, for seeing what we are and aping none.”

Finding himself thus beworshipped on both hands, our good friend says:

“You may call me Señor. I am a Spaniard. Don Sanchez del Castillo de Castelaña.” And then to turn the subject, he adds: “I have seen you play twice.”

“Aye, Señor, and I should have known you again if by nothing but this piece of generosity,” replies Dawson, with his cheek full of pasty, “for I remember both times you set down a piece and would take no change.”

Don Sanchez hunched his shoulders cavalierly, as if such trifles were nought to him; but indeed throughout his manner was most high and noble.

And now, being fairly settled down to our repast, we said no more of any moment that I can recall to mind till we had done (which was not until nought remained of the pullets and the pasty but a few bones and the bare dish), and we were drawn round the fire at Don Sanchez’s invitation. Then the drawers, having cleared the tables, brought up a huge bowl of hot spiced wine, a dish of tobacco, and some pipes. The Don then offered us to smoke some cigarros, but we, not understanding them, took instead our homely pipes, and each with a beaker of hot wine to his hand sat roasting before the fire, scarce saying a

word, the Don being silent because his humour was of the reflective grave kind (with all his courtesies he never smiled, as if such demonstrations were unbecoming to his dignity), and we from repletion and a feeling of wondrous contentment and repose. And another thing served to keep us still, which was that our Moll, sitting beside her father, almost at once fell asleep, her head lying against his shoulder as he sat with his arm about her waist. As at the table, Don Sanchez had seated himself where he could best observe her, and now he scarcely once took his eyes off her, which were half closed as if in speculation. At length, taking the cigarro from his lips, he says softly to Jack Dawson, so as not to arouse Moll:

“Your daughter.”

Jack nods for an answer, and looking down on her face with pride and tenderness, he put back with the stem of his pipe a little curl that had strayed over her eyes. She was not amiss for looks thus, with her long eyelashes lying like a fringe upon her cheeks, her lips open, showing her good white teeth, and the glow of the firelight upon her face; but her attitude and the innocent, happy expression of her features made up a picture which seemed to me mighty pretty.

“Where is her mother?” asks Don Sanchez, presently; and Dawson, without taking his eyes from Moll’s face, lifts his pipe upwards, while his big thick lips fell a-trembling. Maybe, he was thinking of his poor Betty as he looked at the child’s face.

“Has she no other relatives?” asks the Don, in the same quiet tone; and Jack shakes his head, still looking down, and answers lowly:

“Only me.”

Then after another pause the Don asks:

“What will become of her?”

And that thought also must have been in Jack Dawson's mind; for without seeming surprised by the question, which appeared a strange one, he answers reverently, but with a shake in his hoarse voice, "Almighty God knows."

This stilled us all for the moment, and then Don Sanchez, seeing that these reflections threw a gloom upon us, turned to me, sitting next him, and asked if I would give him some account of my history, whereupon I briefly told him how three years ago Jack Dawson had lifted me out of the mire, and how since then we had lived in brotherhood. "And," says I in conclusion, "we will continue with the favour of Providence to live so, sharing good and ill fortune alike to the end, so much we do love one another."

To this Jack Dawson nods assent.

"And your other fellow,—what of him?" asked Don Sanchez.

I replied that Ned Herring was but a fair-weather friend, who had joined fortunes with us to get out of London and escape the Plague, and how having robbed us, we were like never to see his face again.

"And well for him if we do not," cries Dawson, rousing up; "for by the Lord, if I clap eyes on him, though it be a score of years hence, he shan't escape the most horrid beating ever man outlived!"

The Don nodded his satisfaction at this, and then Moll, awaking with the sudden outburst of her father's voice, gives first a gape, then a shiver, and looking about her with an air of wonder, smiles as her eye fell on the Don. Whereon, still as solemn as any judge, he pulls the bell, and the maid, coming to the room with a rushlight, he bids her take the poor weary child to bed, and the best there is in the house, which I think did delight Dawson not less than his Moll to hear.

Then Moll gives her father a kiss, and me another according to her wont, and drops a civil curtsy to Don Sanchez.

“Give me thy hand, child,” says he; and having it, he lifts it to his lips and kisses it as if she had been the finest lady in the land.

She being gone, the Don calls for a second bowl of spiced wine, and we, mightily pleased at the prospect of another half-hour of comfort, stretch our legs out afresh before the fire. Then Don Sanchez, lighting another cigarro, and setting his chair towards us, says as he takes his knee up betwixt his long, thin fingers:

“Now let us come to the heart of this business and understand one another clearly.”

Chapter III



O*f that design which Don Sanchez opened to us at the Bell.*

We pulled our pipes from our mouths, Dawson and I, and stretched our ears very eager to know what this business was the Don had to propound, and he, after drawing two or three mouthfuls of smoke, which he expelled through his nostrils in a most surprising unnatural manner, says in excellent good English, but speaking mighty slow and giving every letter its worth:

“What do you go to do to-morrow?”

“The Lord only knows,” answers Jack, and Don Sanchez, lifting his eyebrows as if he considers this no answer at all, he continues: “We cannot go hence with none of our stage things; and if we could, I see not how we are to act our play, now that our villain is gone, with a plague to him! I doubt but we must sell all that we have for the few shillings they will fetch to get us out of this hobble.”

“With our landlord’s permission,” remarks Don Sanchez, dryly.

“Permission!” cries Dawson, in a passion. “I ask no man’s permission to do what I please with my own.”

“Suppose he claims these things in payment of the money you owe him. What then?” asks the Don.

“We never thought of that, Kit,” says Dawson, turning to me in a pucker. “But ‘tis likely enough he has, for I observed he was mighty careless whether

we found our thief or not. That's it, sure enough. We have nought to hope. All's lost!"

With that he drops his elbows on his knees, and stares into the fire with a most desponding countenance, being in that stage of liquor when a man must either laugh or weep.

"Come, Jack," says I. "You are not used to yield like this. Let us make the best of a bad lot, and face the worst like men. Though we trudge hence with nothing but the rags on our backs, we shall be no worse off to-morrow than we were this morning."

"Why, that's true enough!" cries he, plucking up his courage. "Let the thieving rascal take our poor nag and our things for his payment, and much good may they do him. We will wipe this out of our memory the moment we leave his cursed inn behind us."

It seemed to me that this would not greatly advance us, and maybe Don Sanchez thought the same, for he presently asks:

"And what then?"

"Why, Señor," replies Dawson, "we will face each new buffet as it comes, and make a good fight of it till we're beat. A man may die but once."

"You think only of yourselves," says the Don, very quietly.

"And pray, saving your Señor's presence, who else should we think of?"

"The child above," answers the Don, a little more sternly than he had yet spoken. "Is a young creature like that to bear the buffets you are so bold to meet? Can you offer her no shelter from the wind and rain but such as chance offers? make no provision for the time when she is left alone, to protect her against the evils that lie in the path of friendless maids?"

"God forgive me," says Jack, humbly. And then we could say nothing, for thinking what might befall Moll if we should be parted, but sat there under the

keen eye of Don Sanchez, looking helplessly into the fire. And there was no sound until Jack's pipe, slipping from his hand, fell and broke in pieces upon the hearth. Then rousing himself up and turning to Don Sanchez, he says:

"The Lord help her, Señor, if we find no good friend to lend us a few shillings for our present wants."

"Good friends are few," says the Don, "and they who lend need some better security for repayment than chance. For my own part, I would as soon fling straws to a drowning man as attempt to save you and that child from ruin by setting you on your feet to-day only to fall again to-morrow."

"If that be so, Señor," says I, "you had some larger view in mind than that of offering temporary relief to our misery when you gave us a supper and Moll a bed for the night."

Don Sanchez assented with a grave inclination of his head, and going to the door opened it sharply, listened awhile, and then closing it softly, returned and stood before us with folded arms. Then, in a low voice, not to be heard beyond the room, he questioned us very particularly as to our relations with other men, the length of time we had been wandering about the country, and especially about the tractability of Moll. And, being satisfied with our replies,—above all, with Jack's saying that Moll would jump out of window at his bidding, without a thought to the consequences,—he says:

"There's a comedy we might play to some advantage if you were minded to take the parts I give you and act them as I direct."

"With all my heart," cries Dawson. "I'll play any part you choose; and as to the directing, you're welcome to that, for I've had my fill of it. If you can make terms with our landlord, those things in the yard shall be yours, and for our payment I'm willing to trust to your honour's generosity."

“As regards payment,” says the Don, “I can speak precisely. We shall gain fifty thousand pounds by our performance.”

“Fifty thousand pounds,” says Jack, as if in doubt whether he had heard aright. Don Sanchez bent his head, without stirring a line in his face.

Dawson took up his beaker slowly, and looked in it, to make sure that he was none the worse for drink, then, after emptying it, to steady his wits, he says again:

“Fifty thousand pounds.”

“Fifty thousand pounds, if not more; and that there be no jealousies one of the other, it shall be divided fairly amongst us,—as much for your friend as for you, for the child as for me.”

“Pray God, this part be no more than I can compass,” says Jack, devoutly.

“You may learn it in a few hours—at least, your first act.”

“And mine?” says I, entering for the first time into the dialogue.

The Don hunched his shoulders, lifting his eyebrows, and sending two streams of smoke from his nose.

“I scarce know what part to give you, yet,” says he. “To be honest, you are not wanted at all in the play.”

“Nay, but you must write him a part,” says Dawson, stoutly; “if it be but to bring in a letter—that I am determined on. Kit stood by us in ill fortune, and he shall share better, or I’ll have none of it, nor Moll neither. I’ll answer for her.”

“There must be no discontent among us,” says the Don, meaning thereby, as I think, that he had included me in his stratagem for fear I might mar it from envy. “The girl’s part is that which gives me most concern—and had I not faith in my own judgment—”

“Set your mind at ease on that score,” cried Jack. “I warrant our Moll shall learn her part in a couple of days or so.”

“If she learn it in a twelvemonth, ‘twill be time enough.”

“A twelvemonth,” said Jack, going to his beaker again, for understanding. “Well, all’s as one, so that we can get something in advance of our payment, to keep us through such a prodigious study.”

“I will charge myself with your expenses,” says Don Sanchez; and then, turning to me, he asks if I have any objection to urge.

“I take it, Señor, that you speak in metaphor,” says I; “and that this ‘comedy’ is nought but a stratagem for getting hold of a fortune that doesn’t belong to us.”

Don Sanchez calmly assented, as if this had been the most innocent design in the world.

“Hang me,” cries Dawson, “if I thought it was anything but a whimsey of your honour’s.”

“I should like to know if we may carry out this stratagem honestly,” says I.

“Aye,” cries Jack. “I’ll not agree for cutting of throats or breaking of bones, for any money.”

“I can tell you no more than this,” says the Don. “The fortune we may take is now in the hands of a man who has no more right to it than we have.”

“If that’s so,” says Jack, “I’m with you, Señor. For I’d as lief bustle a thief out of his gains as say my prayers, any day, and liefer.”

“Still,” says I, “the money must of right belong to some one.”

“We will say that the money belongs to a child of the same age as Moll.”

“Then it comes to this, Señor,” says I, bluntly. “We are to rob that child of fifty thousand pounds.”

“When you speak of robbing,” says the Don, drawing himself up with much dignity, “you forget that I am to play a part in this stratagem—I, Don Sanchez del Castillo de Castelaña.”

“Fie, Kit, han’t you any manners?” cries Dick. “What’s all this talk of a child? Hasn’t the Señor told us we are but to bustle a cheat?”

“But I would know what is to become of this child, if we take her fortune, though it be withheld from her by another,” says I, being exceeding obstinate and persistent in my liquor.

“I shall prove to your conviction,” says the Don, “that the child will be no worse off, if we take this money, than if we leave it in the hands of that rascally steward. But I see,” adds he, contemptuously, “that for all your brotherly love, ‘tis no such matter to you whether poor little Molly comes to her ruin, as every maid must who goes to the stage, or is set beyond the reach of temptation and the goading of want.”

“Aye, and be hanged to you, Kit!” cries Dawson.

“Tell me, Mr. Poet,” continues Don Sanchez, “do you consider this steward who defrauds that child of a fortune is more unfeeling than you who, for a sickly qualm of conscience, would let slip this chance of making Molly an honest woman?”

“Aye, answer that, Kit,” adds Jack, striking his mug on the table.

“I’ll answer you to-morrow morning, Señor,” says I. “And whether I fall in with the scheme or not is all as one, since my help is not needed; for if it be to Moll’s good, I’ll bid you farewell, and you shall see me never again.”

“Spoken like a man!” says Don Sanchez, “and a wise one to boot. An enterprise of this nature is not to be undertaken without reflection, like the smoking of a pipe. If you put your foot forward, it must be with the

understanding that you cannot go back. I must have that assurance, for I shall be hundreds of pounds out of pocket ere I can get any return for my venture.”

“Have no fear of me or of Moll turning tail at a scarecrow,” says Jack, adding with a sneer, “we are no poets.”

“Reflect upon it. Argue it out with your friend here, whose scruples do not displease me, and let me know your determination when the last word is said. Business carries me to London to-morrow; but you shall meet me at night, and we will close the business—aye or nay—ere supper.”

With that he opens the door and gives us our congee, the most noble in the world; but not offering to give us a bed, we are forced to go out of doors and grope our way through the snow to the cart-shed, and seek a shelter there from the wind, which was all the keener and more bitter for our leaving a good fire. And I believe the shrewd Spaniard had put us to this pinch as a foretaste of the misery we must endure if we rejected his design, and so to shape our inclinations to his.

Happily, the landlord, coming out with a lantern, and finding us by the chattering of our teeth, was moved by the consideration shown us by Don Sanchez to relax his severity; and so, unlocking the stable door, he bade us get up into the loft, which we did, blessing him as if he had been the best Christian in the world. And then, having buried ourselves in hay, Jack Dawson and I fell to arguing the matter in question, I sticking to my scruples (partly from vanity), and he stoutly holding t’other side; and I, being warmed by my own eloquence, and he not less heated by liquor (having taken best part of the last bowl to his share), we ran it pretty high, so that at one point Jack was for lighting a candle end he had in his pocket and fighting it out like men. But, little by little, we cooled down, and towards morning, each giving way something, we came to the conclusion that we would have Don Sanchez show