JOSEPH JEFFERSON.

(From the Autobiography of Joseph Jefferson.)

After mentioning that he had engaged a comedian, Sir William Don, an English nobleman six feet six inches tall, Jefferson wrote:

"Sir William went with us to Wilmington, North Carolina, where we opened with the stock, he appearing at the beginning of the second week. The audience here did not like his acting; they seemed to prefer our domestic goods to the imported article. He saw this, but did not seem to mind it, and so bowed to the situation. He became very much attached to the company and remained with us some time, joining in our fishing and boating parties. His animal spirits were contagious; and as we had no rehearsals, the mornings at least were devoted to amusement. We would do the most boyish and ridiculous things. Three or four of us, himself the central figure, would go through extravagant imitations of the circus and acrobatic feats that were then in vogue. *The Bounding Brothers of the Pyrenees* was a particular favorite with him. We would pretend to execute the most dangerous feats of strength—lifting imaginary weights, climbing on one another's shoulders, and then falling down in grotesque and awkward attitudes, and suddenly straightening up and bowing with mock dignity to an imaginary audience. Once he did an act called *The Sprite of the Silver Shower,* pretending to be a little girl, and tripping into the circus ring with a mincing step. Then, with a shy look, he would put his finger in his mouth, and mounting a table would go through a daring bareback feat. Nothing that I ever saw was more extravagant. * * *

"The next fall, 1852, we resolved to make another trial of our fortunes in the Southern circuit. Our limited means compelled us to adopt the most economical mode of transportation for the company. It was settled, therefore, that we, the managers, should arrive at least a week in advance of the opening season; our passage must be by rail, while the company were to proceed by sea. There was in those days a line of schooners that plied between Wilmington, N. C., and New York. The articles of transportation from the South consisted mainly of yellow pine tar and resin, which cargo was denominated 'naval stores.' Feeling confident that we could procure passage for our

company by contracting with one of these vessels to take them to Wilmington, we determined to conclude a bargain with the owners. The day was fixed for their departure, and Mr. Ellsler and I went down to the wharf at Peck Slip to see them off. It was an ill-shaped hulk, with two great, badly repaired sails flapping against her clumsy and foreboding masts. The deck and sides were besmeared with the sticky remnants of her last importation, so that when our leading actor, who had been seated on the taffrail, arose to greet his managers, he was unavoidably detained. There was handsome John Crocher, our juvenile actor, leaning with folded arms and a rueful face against an adhesive mast; Mrs. Ray, the first old woman, with an umbrella in one hand and a late dramatic paper in the other, sitting on a coil of rope, and unconsciously ruining her best black dress, etc., etc. It was a doleful picture. Our second comedian, who was the reverse of being droll on the stage, but who now and then ventured on a grim joke off it with better success, told me in confidence that they all had been lamenting their ill-tarred fate. As we watched the wretched old craft being towed away to sea, we concluded that we should never forgive ourselves if our comrades were never heard of again. On our arrival in Wilmington the days were spent in preparing the dusty old rat-trap of a theatre for the opening, and our nights in wondering if our party were safe. The uneasiness was not lessened, either, by the news that there had been bad weather off Hatteras. Within a week, however, they arrived, looking jaded and miserable. Another week for rest and rehearsal, and our labors began.

"Comedy and tragedy were dished up, and I may say, hashed up, alternately, as, for instance, Monday, Colman's comedy of *The Poor Gentleman,* fancy dances by the soubrette, comic songs by the second comedian, concluding with the farce of *The Spectre Bridegroom.* The next evening we gave *Romeo and Juliet.* I felt that the balcony scene should have some attention, and I conceived a simple and economical idea that would enable me to produce the effect in a manner 'hitherto unparalleled in the annals of the stage.' Skirmishing about the wharves and the ship-chandlers, I chanced to light upon a job lot of empty candle boxes. By taking a quantity the cardboards were thrown in, and nothing makes a finer or more imposing but unsubstantial balustrade than cardboard. The boxes, placed one by one on top of each other and painted a neat stone color, form a pleasing architectural pile. The scene opened with a backing