

A "HERALD" CANARD

The New York Herald of Monday morning contained a rather remarkable story concerning what it termed an alleged attempt to blackmail Edwin Booth. It was a long and sensational story, which, after telling of what was alleged to have happened to the actor, went on to relate a mass of irrelevant things about Mr. Booth's life, Mr. Jefferson's personal experiences, and other matters, to give length to the article and make it seem more important than it really was. Stripped of this quantity of irrelevant matter, the Herald's story is as follows:

Mr. Edwin Booth, the distinguished actor, has, it is reported, been the object of a conspiracy to obtain money from him.

The rumor has been current for sometime. When the information was brought to the Herald office the Herald declined to have anything to do with it until the alleged facts were proven.

Generally the rumor was that a disreputable newspaper man and a person connected with the stage had for years in their possession a document relating to an incident in Mr. Booth's family, but of which Mr. Booth was not aware until informed by the conspirators, and for which he was in no way responsible, and that they had used this knowledge to blackmail him.

The story went on to say that Mr. Booth had been harassed by these men; that their persecution had even affected his brain, and that this, the breakdown of his mental powers, was the primary cause of his retirement from the stage.

The late Lawrence Barrett, it was said, had interposed between the supposed conspirators and his friend. Mr. Barrett did not believe the story which these men said they had to tell, and argued that all probabilities and possibilities were against its truth. Nevertheless, rather than see his colleague and friend put to the trouble and annoyance of coming out in public and denying allegations that were absurd, Barrett paid them to discontinue their annoyance.

When, however, Barrett died, the alleged blackmailers, so it is said, began once more to annoy Mr. Booth. Booth had been ill sometime before his colleague's demise, but the latter's sudden death was an additional shock to his nervous system and he was forced to retire from the stage.

In this condition he was an easy prey, it was rumored, to the alleged conspirators. But one of his remaining staunchest friends was his brother actor, Mr. Joseph Jefferson. Mr. Jefferson has a magnificent summer residence at Buzzards Bay, Mass., in the region of Cape Cod. Hither Mr. Jefferson invited his friend, and here the sick man is secure from all intruders.

The incident in Mr. Booth's family, or rather the alleged incident, which the newspaper man and the stage person referred to say they have proof to corroborate, came originally from A. R. Cazauran, the adapter of plays. Cazauran died in January, 1889.

The adapter of plays, I am told, either invented it or imagined it from some idle story he had heard. At any rate, it is stated that he once used the story to annoy Mr. Booth. The probabilities are that the men indicated got their information such as it was, from or through Cazauran.

The reason their "secret" became common rumor was that Mr. Booth was not quite the man they expected, and would not put his hand deeply into his pocket. As Mr. Jefferson expressed it, Mr. Booth was a "fighter". Then this rascally pair began to talk, and hence gossip. However, it will not be healthy for the brace of conspirators to pursue the course they have begun in reference to Mr. Booth. They will probably take the hint which is here given them, and if they do not, then the Herald will have another chapter to write.

This article immediately followed the one entitled "A 'Herald' Canard", on Page 5, of the July 25, 1891, issue of the Dramatic News:

Some years ago in an apartment in the Alpine building, at the corner of Broadway and 33d St., there met one night a party consisting of Steele Mackaye and his brother or cousin of the name of Mackaye, Frank A. Burr, a journalist, and Charles W. Brooke, a celebrated practitioner at the New York bar. Mr. Burr had in his possession a package of letters written in French or German, and alleged to be a correspondence between Agatha Delanoir and her sister Theresa. Agatha writing from this country to her sister who lived abroad, and Therese answering to America. These letters were the subject of the evenings conversation between the gentlemen here named, and it was stated that they told an extraordinary story of the romance of Junius Brutus Booth's life. The tale was that Booth -- the father of Edwin Booth -- had in his early career married Agatha Delanoir against the wishes of her parents, and had subsequently gone to London to become an actor, receiving at first a salary of six dollars a week, and then ten dollars weekly. He began to despair of his success in this career, and at one time thought of joining the English army to fight against Napoleon, but finally came to America, as was alleged, in the company of a flower girl he had met at Drury Lane. There had meanwhile been born to Agatha Delanoir, a son, who was named Robert Booth, and who, when he grew up, came to America, where he found his father surrounded by a growing family. Robert was a hospital nurse and saw but little of his father, but what he did see convinced him that his mother ought to be here, and so he wrote requesting her to come across the water. She did come, and without pausing in New York to interfere with Junius Brutus Booth's great success, she proceeded to her son's humble home in Baltimore, where she took up her residence. When Mr. Booth came there to play an engagement, according to the alleged translations of these letters, she presented herself to him and was repulsed, he undertaking to silence her with declarations that he was sufficiently powerful to destroy her. She sought legal advice concerning this conduct on his part, and he was taken to court to answer. He agreed if she would return to her home, to pay her 120 pounds, and with this money she was prepared to go home to her sister and remain there. But before she could leave, she was taken ill, and died in Baltimore, in the outskirts of which city it is alleged that she is buried under a tombstone bearing the legend, "Agatha Delanoir, wife of Junius Brutus Booth." Robert Booth, the alleged son of this alleged union, went to the war, and died of consumption. Such is the story that was discussed in the Alpine apartment house. Mr. Burr said he came into possession of the papers through the Delanoir family, to whom he wrote for information upon stumbling across the Baltimore tombstone. He had no intention of using the papers, even if he believed them to be genuine--which in all likelihood, they were not. Stuart Robson one of Mr. Booth's closest friends, is said to have mentioned the fact that Steele Mackaye had offered to write a life of Edwin Booth, and it is supposed that in some way the whole matter had become muddled and tangled until it has finally reached the Herald in the shape of an absurd story of blackmail. Certainly no person would suspect either of the gentlemen named of any such conduct any more than he would believe the story of Agatha Delanoir's alleged letters.