THE JOLLY BUTCHERS: AN OLD TIME FOOT RACE*

By John M. Killin

Prominent among the butchers who did business in the old Diamond Market fifty years ago, was Robert Shaw, familiarly called "Old Bob." He was a large corpulent man, noted for his genial disposition and great personal strength, being near six feet in height, with an avoirdupois of about three hundred pounds. When he was in a social gathering he always contributed largely to the enjoyment of the occasion not only by his sayings and doings, but, also, by the many funny comparisons, and the sly jokes which were passed in reference to his extensive boundaries, and the size of his corporation. On one of these occasions a brother butcher whose name, I think, was Tesh, challenged "old Bob" to run him a foot race, the loser to pay for a supper for all the Diamond market butchers. As the banter was only intended to remind "old Bob" of his superfluous flesh and fat, the company was surprised when he said he would accept the challenging if he would be permitted to select the ground, name the distance, and receive six feet start. Tesh, with a proviso that the distance would not be less than one hundred feet, readily agreed to the conditions and the next day, after market hours, was fixed as the time for the race.

To all the many inquiries made of him as to where the race would come off and how long the course would be, "old Bob" only answered, "Let all who want to see fun meet at Sirwell's Watch Making Shop tomorrow afternoon."

At the appointed time all the butchers and many others met at the place designated corner of fifth street and market alley among whom were the competitors. Doubtless there was not one man in the party who expected to see a fair square race between the two men, as all knew that it would be physically impossible for "Old Bob" to contend against Tesh with any hope of success.

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but all did expect to see a large amount of fun which they felt certain was in some shape or another in store for them.

After "Old Bob" had spent some time moving through the crowd urging his friends to bet their piles on him, as he was sure to win, he walked over the street and stopped in front of a small alley, about three feet wide, and said, "The race will be run in that alley, and the distance will be down to the "Crows Nest" in Virgin alley. He took a position in the alley and said, "Measure six feet back, put Tesh on the line and give the word. I am ready." Then the spectators saw that his huge body filled the entrance and that it would be impossible for Tesh to pass him in it. The secret of "Old Bob's" confidence that he would win was apparent and he was greeted with cheers and shouts of laughter. Tesh knew all the time that "Old Bob" expected to win which he hoped to defeat by some kind of strategy but was not prepared for the cunning trap in which he had been caught. He, however, resolved to follow him and trust to luck for some chance to get past and when the word was given to go he bounded in the alley. "Old Bob" started at a moderate pace, having braced himself so firmly that when Tesh ran against him he was almost immovable. All his continued efforts to pass were fruitless and were greeted by those who were following them in the alley and others who were waiting for them at the "Crows Nest" with loud cheers and screams of laughter. Finally during one of Tesh's desperate struggles to get over old Bob's head the latter caught him and held him on his back until he emerged from the alley, winner of the race.