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JUDY'S LITERARY KETTLEDRUM.

Guest of the Hour: The G.O.M. (Retired).



THERE was sherry and honey in a goblet on Judy's table last Thursday. The fact was significant; for we were entertaining one whom, politically, we could not entertain, although, as a literary practitioner, he was welcome.

"It is a curious circumstance," said the G. O. M. circuitously, "that I, who have, for the greater part of my career—a career, be it said, of unusual length and industry—during which I have seen the rise and fall of numerous men and ministries, that I, I say, who have, in the manner aforesaid, served the Liberal cause, should at length be seated in office—that is, in the office of the Conservative comic."

"Ah, Mr. G.O.M., said Judy feelingly, "time was."

"True," said the G.O.M., "time was. I began on your side."

"A good beginning," blurted out the Lunatic, "always makes a—Ow!"

A sly, but effective, kick from the Business

Manager had averted the intended conclusion.

"A bad ending, you would say, my young friend," continued the Ancient Grandeur, benignly. "Possibly, possibly; but recollect, we have not yet seen the end."

"As long's there's life there's hope," the proverbial Lunatic murmured, *sotto voce*; and thereupon, to prevent further awkwardness, he was turned out at a sign from our mistress. There are periods when that young man requires restraint—kind, but firm. His proverbial moods are insufferable.

"At the Literary Kettledrum," remarked Judy, "Politics we bar, as they say in *Princess Ida*."

"Admirable!" said the G.O.M. "Most fitting, too, for my case. Now that I have retired, I am, *ex hypothesi*, a plain man of letters, of no party."

"Pardon me," said Judy archly, "but you are at least of one party."

"Which?" queried the Ancient. "Enlighten me, pray. I don't know, as Horace says, 'where I are.' Of which party, please?"

"My tea-party."

"Ah, to be sure. A nice old man for a small tea-party, as the saying is. Well, well, Judy. It's pleasant, even in a literary capacity, to return to one's first love. And now, dear Madam, will you and your young gentlemen have the goodness to advise me about a little work I think of publishing?"

"Honoured, delighted!" sang the staff in chorus: "if we are competent."

"The work," said the Ancient, adjusting his spectacles, "I propose to call 'Recreations of a Retired Life.' It's a collection of little poems scribbled on spoiled post-cards, and mainly autobiographical in character, though not invariably so. The metre is presumably an Irish one, commonly called the 'Limerick stanza.' It does not occur in Horace. Shall I begin?"

"If you please," said Judy eagerly. The young men were also eager.

The Ancient arranged a bundle of post-cards on the table, and then, selecting one, proceeded to read aloud, with fine elocution:—

"There lives an old Woodman in Wales
Who cut Parliamentary pales,
And fled from the bustle
Of politic tussle
To annotate nursery tales."

"Therein," said Judy, "I find at least one essential of great poetry—Truth. Pray proceed."

So the Ancient proceeded:—

"Said he, 'Now I'm out of the game,
If factions are fanned to a flame,
By my trusty old whistle,
The *private* epistle;
For that, I'm in noway to blame."

"Of course not," said Judy. "We thirst for more. This is a great historical poem, Sir."

"Possibly. I'm not so sure, myself, what is fact, and what is fancy. But, to resume—

But, tiring of nursery rhymes;
And mindful of 'Tracts for the Times,'
He tried something subtler—
Went editing Butler,
And merited publisher's dimes."

"The labourer is worthy of his hire," commented Judy, amicably, and the reader proceeded:—

"With Theology further he delved;
The Fathers to witness he raved,
And wrote to the Pope,
In the confident hope
That Anglican Orders were valid.
This letter his Holiness slighted—
The Churches were not reunited;
Nor will they be wed
By a Vatican spread
To which only Romanist tars are invited!

"That's one for his nob, as we used to say at Eton," said the Ancient, jocosely, in conclusion.

"Your last line, Sir," criticised Judy, "was not in strict metre."

"No, Madam, but on such occasions it is difficult to moderate one's verse. His Holiness threw away the chance of his life in not inviting the Anglican Jack Tars as well—to the banquet, I mean, of course, not to the church-service."

"Ah well," sighed Judy, "we are not all so subtle as some we could name." And then the conversation became uninteresting; for the Business Manager proceeded to give the Ancient some friendly little "tips" about the publication of his poem.

"Before the Ancient took leave, however, he showed us that we had quite misunderstood his verses, which do not mean the same thing twice running, or, twice reading. Reading or running, it matters not. They may mean anything, or nothing, or both. I am inclined to bet on "both."

THE KETTLEDRUMMER.

