

STORIES  
POETRY

## The Inglenook

SKETCHES  
TRAVEL

## THE QUIETUS OF MISS JERUSHY.

By Charles Frederic Goss.

Miss Jerushy had been the direct or indirect cause of the dissolution of every relationship in the Wallingford Presbyterian Church during a quarter of a century. Why those twelve or fifteen able ministers of the gospel and that congregation of pious and sensible people had let this meddlesome old maid upset all their plans and destroy all their prospects, nobody could tell. Perhaps the reason lay in the essential goodness of Miss Jerushy's heart, for her devotion to the church was never called in question. It was this very zeal, no doubt, which made it impossible for her to put up with mediocre success. When, therefore, a new minister began to fall short of perfection, her righteous soul would swell with indignation. At first, she would berate the minister himself, and then, if he did not make good, begin to stir up the membership. The symptoms of Miss Jerushy's going on the warpath were unmistakable—the war paint, feathers, tomahawks and ghost dances of Indians finding a counterpart in her plain black Sunday bonnet; shiny, brocaded dress; faded green parasol, and wild dashes into stores, residences and church societies.

Whenever the congregation observed these goings-on, it knew that within a short time there would be another preacher's scalp suspended at Miss Jerushy's belt. Educated in an Eastern school and reared upon the Shorter Catechism the Westminster Confession of Faith, Calvin's Institutes, and above all, the English Bible, Miss Jerushy was a formidable critic, and more than one of the most cultivated of all this series of clergymen had confessed that when he felt her little black eyes riveted upon his face his ideas would vanish like a covey of quail. By these persistent assaults upon its peace the church had been gradually divided into warring factions. Good neighbors and faithful friends were separated by suspicions and misunderstandings. Occasionally, some deacon or elder had taken it upon himself to remonstrate with Miss Jerushy; but without success. Once or twice, a preacher, more belligerent than the rest, had tried to organize a rebellion against the tyrant; but had met his Waterloo.

Living entirely at home in a tasteful cottage upon a generous income, Miss Jerushy was rigid in her self-denial, generous in her benefactions and scrupulous in her dealings, and had acquired both influence and power. Had it not been for the facts that her wig was never quite straight upon her head nor spectacles upon her nose, and that her gold plate was loose in the roof of her mouth, she would have presented an attractive, as she did an imposing, appearance.

For the first six months the last minister in this long procession which had filled so rapidly through the church, succeeded in avoiding all the ordinary pitfalls into which his predecessors had stumbled. At the mature age of fifty years he was pleasing in person, tactful in methods, resourceful in emergencies, and Miss Jerushy had actually begun to think that the ideal man had arrived; but one Sunday morning a single sentence of his sermon not only contained a grammatical error but a theological heresy, and Miss Jerushy once more went upon the warpath.

To the astonishment of the congregation and even of the session the Reverend Joseph Rowland Gill was not disturbed. The information of the outbreak reached his ears on Friday morning and in the afternoon, having called upon his elders in rotation, he went straight to Miss Jerushy's cottage. Very few people had ever succeeded in travelling that pathway from the gate to the door without attracting the attention of the lynx-like eye of its

occupant, but it so happened that on this eventful afternoon Miss Jerushy was so absorbed in an argument with one of her neighbors over the unsound theology of the minister, that she did not discover his approach until she saw him standing on the porch.

The sudden vision of the kindly countenance of this very man whose influence she was trying to undermine, abashed and bewildered Miss Jerushy so completely that she committed a great sin and (what some people think is infinitely worse) a great blunder.

"I will not see him! You will have to tell him I am not home," she explained to her companion in a voice of suppressed emotion, and plunging into the parlor closet, shut the door.

If Miss Jerushy was bewildered by the minister's sudden appearance, her guest was not less so by this unexpected command. Hurrying to the door, she repeated the words of her hostess, but with a tell-tale face which the Rev. Joseph Rowland Gill was too keen an observer not to see.

"Well, I will just step in," he said, coupling the suspicions aroused by the woman's manner with a certain scuffling sound and the violent slamming of a door, as if someone in the house were trying to escape. Mrs. Lasher backed nervously into the parlor, seated herself stiffly on the edge of an old hair-covered lounge and beckoned the visitor to a chair.

"I am sorry that Miss Jerushy is not in, but as my business is very important, I will wait," he said, looking keenly into the flushed face of his hostess.

Mrs. Lasher did not reply. The situation was too terrible to admit of clear thinking by such slow wits as hers. Her naturally dull countenance became absolutely vacant.

"She will not be gone long, I presume?" the preacher asked.

"I—I don't know," Mrs. Lasher replied.

"You are waiting for her yourself, no doubt?"

"Yes—that is to say—I was—I mean am, but I must be—be going," she stammered, trying to overcome a feeling of paralysis in her limbs.

"It will be unfortunate if I can not see Miss Jerushy today," the minister continued, "as she stands in a very critical position in the church. The session is about to take an action that is of the utmost importance to her, and I called to forewarn her of the danger she is in."

Confident belief that Miss Jerushy's ears would hear these ominous words had led the Reverend Mr. Gill to make this brusque announcement in a loud tone of voice, and its effect was instantaneous. The weak underjaw of the terrified Mrs. Lasher dropped perceptibly, and there was a sudden sound on the other side of the closet door as if somebody had uttered an inarticulate expression of wrath.

The minister pretended not to hear, and addressing himself to Mrs. Lasher in the most impartial and unconcerned manner, said, "You see, Miss Jerushy has become to be a public nuisance. She has driven more than a dozen ministers out of this church in the last quarter of a century, and when I accepted the call, it was upon an express agreement that if she became cantankerous again, the session would try her for conduct destructive of the peace of the church, and if necessary, suspend her from membership."

This cold, matter-of-fact statement took Mrs. Lasher's breath away, and her two fat hands rose up in a gesture of despair.

"I tell you this," continued Mr. Gill, "because you are a friend of Miss Jerushy's and may be able to influence her. You are quite sure that she is not at home?"

Mrs. Lasher's agony had become all but unendurable. The perspiration stood in great beads on her retreating forehead.

"It's terribly hot," she said, wiping it away with her handkerchief.

"I thought the day was chilly," the minister replied.

"Oh, no! You are mistaken—I am burning up—I must get some air—and besides, I must be going home," she gasped, rising and moving unsteadily towards the door.

"Very well. Good-by. I will wait. It is extremely important that I should see Miss Jerushy. I shall try to point out to her how very unpleasant it would be to lose her membership in the church and be made an object of public scorn. I shall trust you to do the same. If you meet her, tell her that I am waiting."

By this time Mrs. Lasher had passed gaspingly through the front door, but seemed scarcely to find enough air to breathe in the whole outside world.

After she had gone Mr. Gill smiled toward the closet door, at which he also made a significant gesture with his forefinger, as much as to say, "The Lord has delivered you into the hands of the enemy, Miss Jerushy."

Clasping his palms under the skirts of his coat in the most complaisant attitude known to man, and whistling a Christian hymn, the preacher began to pace the room, thinking to himself, "It won't do any harm to give her plenty of time to think."

There can be no doubt that Miss Jerushy was making good use of a few brief moments which seemed more like aeons. The predicament which she found herself in was horrible. She had told a lie and involved a neighbor in its endless complications. She was imprisoned in a closet whose limited supply of air she had already breathed over several times. If she should permit her captor to go, she would undoubtedly die of strangulation, for there was no inside knob on the lock! If she should make her whereabouts known and appeal for release, the mortification of facing a minister of the gospel with a lie upon her conscience would certainly kill her dead! Perhaps she had better die! A church trial—condemnation—suspension—excommunication! It was horrible!

If Miss Jerushy had been out in the daylight, with plenty of fresh air to breathe, she might have risen above these dangers and fought her way to victory. But in that dark closet with that constantly diminishing supply of oxygen and the preacher pacing the floor outside, she lost her nerve. The bold and terrible charge to which she had listened struck home. She saw herself through the eyes of her neighbors and her friends.

Suddenly the minister heard a sob.

"What's that?" he said, pretending to be surprised.

"It's me," said a faint voice, guilty of its first and only grammatical error.

"Where are you?"

"In the closet."

"I thought you were away from home."

"I'm stifling! Let me out!"

The minister opened the door, and the figure which emerged was scarcely more than a shadow of the resolute and haughty Miss Jerushy. Throwing herself into a rocking chair she put a black brooded handkerchief to her eyes and wept.

"I'm sorry," she said at last, in an almost inaudible voice.

"That settles it," the minister replied, being a man incapable of vindictiveness.

"I'll be good."

"Nobody can be better, when you do your best."

"And there will be no trial?"

"None."

"And—you—won't—tell?"

"Not I! But what about Mrs. Lasher?"

"I'll—take—care—of—her."