

(editor's note: This paper was transcribed from a handwritten cursive copy with various difficulties. For a perfect rendition, the reader might wish to consult the original, itself a copy, in the volume entitled *Literary Club Papers* 2, 1886 – 1887 June 5, '86 to May 21, '87)

An Episode in the Career of a Great Man

A friend was showing me the Law Library in the old Court House, when a voice that had a rasp like a nutmeg grater was suddenly heard. "Take your hat off the table and hang it up! No talking there! Jimmy, go and tell Judge X to shut up. Did you wipe your feet? No strangers allowed in this library! The dime Museum is on Vine Street near Sixth!" As we retreated from the place I asked who was the Cerberus of the Law books. "Oh!" he replied laughingly, "that was Little Red. No, it is not the name of a sunset, nor of a fire engine, nor of a saloon; but one of the greatest little men or littlest great men you ever saw. Let me tell you about him. If cities are the guardians of civilization, why, I suppose that men and women are the flowers: and one of the tulips, the pinks, the dahlias, or rather the sunflowers of the city is Little Red. Y0ou could scarcely believe it, but when I came to this city many years ago this gentleman was walking in front of a clothes store where pantaloons, coats and vests were hung out for sale to tempt the rural rooster who had more money than experience; and Little Red was an expert in sales. The occupation still clings to him; for if you pass by the courthouse at nine in the morning, you will find him trotting up and down, although the pants and coats are no longer hanging up, but walking around him. All at once he became a famous politician. The goal which lured him from cheap commerce to dear politics was the office of sheriff. Whether the notion of hanging up the human race instead of slop-make clothes was more dramatic and tempting, or whether the whole county for a customer was the attraction, I cannot say but he. And as I must say he made a gallant run for the place; but as his legs were not so long as the other fellows, he did not win. Then came the war, and when I came back, my gallant little friend with the blazing disc is law librarian. Why, of all men he should become a custodian of books, and especially law books, it is hard to understand."

"Perhaps," I suggested the sheep-skin books remind him of the sheep who bought a coat for the price of the buttons, or rather the buttons for the price of the coat. Or, having dealt in the wool, he was naturally attracted to the hides."

My friend shook his head. "No, no," he continued, "that ain't it. What blind tom is to music and the piano, Little Red is to the law. He don't read, he don't think; but he has the law as his finger-ends. You may laugh as much as you please. Now, here is the way it works. You have a client who brings you a case: and the problem is to find another just like it. You have got no time to read fifty thousand reports: you run as hard as you can up to the law library, and pour it into Little Red's left ear. Of course he will commence to swear and dance, but you never mind and pour away. Then you just watch him. He will commence to whistle as though he was in a church yard; then he will rush out to see that no one is looking through the keyhole; then he will sit down and draw up an ordinance for the city council condemning the music hall for a law library, and write a letter ordering the county commissioners to pay for his suppers at the St. Nicholas; then he will remember you; and, still whistling he will strike up along the sides of the wall where the

books are shelved, and jump up and down as though he was catching butterflies; but every time he picks out a volume and throws it on the table until you are surrounded with a mountain of books; and in each of those books is a case which fits yours like the paper on the wall. And in the interval he will squelch any attorney who speaks above a whisper in the library. "Can a Cincinnati attorney be squelched?" I asked. "It is nearly as difficult as stopping an earthquake" he replied, "but that reminds me that Little Red himself was squelched one day. It fell out this way.

"You remember the old post office with its Greek façade? Well, at the top of that building was the U.S. court room; and at the back of it, in a sort of blind alley, sat the commissioner, trying people who violated the laws of the United States. I was up there one day when a very interesting case was going on. A girl accused another girl of tampering with her mail – I mean her letters. All the girls who tampered with males were there, and so, in fact, were the males themselves from those who were bald from experience to those who were all hair. A colored man opened the court by shouting, as he waved a dusting brush at the audience "The honorable Commissioner's court is now setting. Silence in the United States. The girl who had been fooling with the other males was defended by two of the smartest men that ever lived. One was the Crane of the Delhi Flats, and the other was the celebrated Tommy, the wild turkey of Walnut Hills. How I pitied that poor commissioner! No sooner did the crane of Delhi Flats stop bawling about the "epaulets of justice" than the wild turkey would rise and explain how ignorant everybody was, and how there was only one man that was ever right, and he lived on top of the hills of Walnut. The commissioner did not look well. He had evidently come across a knotty passage in Kant's Critique of Pure Reason; and it stuck crosswise in his intellect, and refused to go either up or down. And he was weary of Tommy and his tons of knowledge, and tired of the Crane of the Delhi Flats and his eagle scream; and the mixture of girls and bald heads in front didn't strike him as being proper. When lo! A figure suddenly appeared at the door; – it was our friend the librarian. One third of him was shoes, – high heels, and still higher soles; one third of him was hat, white and flossy like the back of a poodle-dog; and the middle third, or tertium quid was Little Red only the red was not little; it was immense, and shone like the sun from a bank of mist.

"What's this? What's the row?" growled the newcomer. "This is a court!" said the man with the fly-brush. "Silence in the united states!" "A court?" he growled, then planked his hat down on a table where it looked like a steam boiler cut in half and turned on an end. "Sit down, sit down," murmured the court. Little Red rolled his orbs like a couple of gooseberries in a saucer, and shaded them with his hand, while he peered at the place where the order came from. Then he snorted and croaked: "The charge – show me the charge, the affidavit – the indictment – quick- hand it out!" the deputy marshal with the fly brush proclaimed once more "the honorable Commissioner – silence in the United States!" "Oh, sit down, sit down," said the court. "No, sir!" said the man of books and blood. "There is no judge in this country dare tell me to sit down. Tommy you d____ fool, show me the affidavit!" Tommy handed to him a paper and Little Red ran his orbs over it as though it was a newspaper, and he was looking for an advertisement for a lost dog: and catching sight of a splash of paint in the corner, he rushed up to where the commissioner sat, and shaking the paper under the court's nose said "squelch it – squelch it – by g__ it ain't legal!" "Sit down – leave the room – or I'll squelch you," roared the court. "What? There are nine judges in my Courthouse, and if the whole nine

were to order me to sit down or to leave the room” shouted the indignant Librarian, “I would, I would.” “Put him out,” commanded the Commissioner. And the man with the fly brush took one third of Little Red off the table, and led the other two thirds to the door, and warned him down the stairs as though he were a blue bottle or a June bug – saying as he did so “Silence in the United States.” There was a twitter in the room, and a fragrant smell of fine old Hennessy Whiskey, but on the stairs, in the hall, on the steps and up the street the curses and threats fell like snow-flakes.

To be ordered out of the room by an understrapper of a court tore the inside out of him. When for years he had carried courts, juries, and counsels around in his pocket. But when he reached the corner of Court and Ninth he made a fearful oath, and washed it down with hand-made sour mash, that if ever the Commissioner came to the Law Library there would be blood on the Moon; and the blood would be that of a U.S. Commissioner. And to this day – although ten years have passed since he was ignominiously driven out of court at the point of a fly brush, he waits for the Commissioner, and I am told the one place in the city the latter never visits is the Law Library and the Dragon in charge. –

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Budget Dexter editor

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