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*WASHIN' JEAN'S COMIC MARRIAGE.*

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THERE is humour and farce in almost all ranks and conditions of life; but, somehow, the broad-featured mask of Fun seems to fit the homelier phases of life better and more naturally than it does the higher grades of society. There is, perhaps, too much formalism and red tape in the upper crust of the social loaf to allow of the free play of native humour and character, qualities which, like so many shifting side-lights, are continually breaking through the darkness and poverty of lowly life. The following amusing story of a courtship and marriage in homely life is a case in point:—

Washin' Jean, as she was familiarly called, was a stout-bodied, hard-visaged, middle-aged nymph of the sop-and-suds profession, that is to say, she was a common work-a-day washer-wife of the hard-wrought, splashin', two shillings-a-day type.

Now, Jean, although only a common washer-wife, was still a woman, and being unmarried, she had still an e'e on the men, and some natural interest in their disposal.

The fact is, although Jean was only a washer-wife, and forty-five years of age, she had a bit of natural romance hidden away under her cotton short-gown which the neighbours round about her hardly suspected.

In secret she sighed and wearied for a bit man, if for naething better than jist to keep her fire-en' warm and furnished-like, and to mak' her mair like her married neighbours roon' aboot. She was often good-humouredly teased on the subject, and didn't particularly relish the banter, which caused her often to sing to herself the following auld maid's ditty:—

Wae's me! for I'm noo forty-five,  
Tho' some even mair wad me ca'!

And yin that's sae lang getting married  
 Has little or nae chance ava.  
 An' when I reflect upon this,  
 Lang sighs frae my bosom I draw;  
 For oh! it's most awfu' to think  
 I'm no to be married ava.

Oh, I wish I could get a bit husband,  
 Altho' he were never sae sma';  
 Be he little or muckle, I'd tak' him—  
 Big or wee is nae maitter ava'.  
 Come sutor, come tailor, come tinkler!  
 Oh! come an' but tak' me awa'!  
 Jist gi'e me a bid ne'er sae little,  
 I'll tak' it an' never sae na'!

Come deaf, or come dumb, or come cripple,  
 Wi' yae leg or nae leg ava',  
 Or come yin wi' yae e'e or nae e'e,  
 I'll tak' him as ready's wi' twa.  
 Come young, or come auld, or come doited—  
 Oh! come ony yin o' ye a'!  
 Faur better be married to something  
 Than no to be married ava'!

But everything comes to those who patiently wait, it is said, and Washin' Jean at last got her chance matrimonial, and—took it.

There was an old dram-drinking Waterloo pensioner who lived in the next court, named Dick Macpherson, and who was better known in the neighbourhood as Corporal Dick.

Dick had served his king and country well in his day and generation as a gallant corporal in the 91st Argyleshire Highland Light Infantry, and, on the expiry of his long-service term, he had been duly pensioned off and relegated to the corps of city pensioners, once familiarly known in Glasgow as the "Auld Fuggies."

Now, like the majority of old military pensioners, Corporal Dick dearly loved a dram, and invariably went heartily for it every quarterly pension-day.

In what way Corporal Dick had got round Washin' Jean, or she, perhaps, had got round him, it is not needful to tell. Suffice it to say, the pair came together as lovers, in some odd way, and as Jean could work for her living, and Corporal Dick enjoyed a quarterly pension from the Government of his country, they respectively seemed a catch in each other's eyes, and so fell to the courting of each other, like two old road-side linties.

"If I only had her," thought Corporal Dick to himself, "I could live off her earnings at the wash-tub, an' drink my pension-money every quarterly pay-day like a lord. She's well worth the catchin'."

And—"If I only had him," thought Washin' Jean to herself, "I could throw up my wearifu' washin' boin, an' live aff the auld general's pension-money. He's weel worth the catchin'."

Being thus both of a mind regarding the value of each other, their courtship was very short, and the upshot of it was correspondingly practical and to the point.

Whether or not the old war-dog ever formally proposed marriage to Washin' Jean is uncertain. If so, the text of the proposal has not reached us. If it was indeed so, the gallant old foggy no doubt announced the proposal in the manner of a regular hand-at-cap military salute.

Anyhow the question seems to have been duly popped and sufficiently understood, in whatever way expressed, and that so expeditiously, too, as to put the marriage of the mature pair under actual arrangement prior to the arrival of the very next quarterly pension-day.

Everything seemed to have gone thus far in terms of the old proverb, as merry as a marriage-bell, when a small cloud of disagreement suddenly discovered itself in the rosy sky of their graphic love affair, thus once more realizing the ancient truism—the course of true love never did run smooth.

The bone of contention between the pair was at once trifling and serious, in the sense that, concerning a very slight affair, a stiff bit of temper was exhibited on both sides, which in the end all but cracked up the consummation of the forthcoming marriage.

The dispute was about Corporal Dick's marriage suit. For Dick, with the strong martial instincts of an old soldier, wanted to sincerely honour his Queen, his country, and himself by getting married in his semi-military pensioner's suit. He wanted also to wear side-arms, and would have even brought his old Waterloo musket along with him to the minister's as well, if he had been permitted to have his own way.

His prospective better-half, however, knocked the mad proposition completely on the head, and the old soldier unwillingly surrendered both musket and side-arms to mollify her displeasure, but stood firmly up for being married, like a true soldier, in his old military dress.

Jean was thus in a fix. The old Waterloo hero was determined on the point, she saw, and to have the match broken off would be to once more expose herself to the by no means complimentary clash of the neighbours. Still, to give in to Corporal Dick in this initial matter, small as it appeared, was to sell herself into prospective bondage and slavery. At least so Jean hastily reasoned within her own mind. She wouldn't consent to this degradation, she finally concluded; no, she wouldn't! The stumbling-block was that the hardy old veteran wouldn't agree to the marriage on any other terms.

"I'll surrender my musket and side-arms for love's sweet sake," he firmly told her over and over again, "but my military dress—never! Rule Britannia, say I, and God save the Queen!"

What was to be done?

Jean was a woman of some resource. She thought the

position thoroughly out in all its phases, and ultimately came to a decided resolution on the matter, a smile of malicious sarcasm irradiating her rather dun countenance at the amusing thought of it. What that resolution was she wisely kept to herself, but proceeded at once to act upon it and bring it on to a successful issue.

"Jean," said the old pensioner to her one day, as an ultimatum, "is the marriage fixed or off?"

This suspense interferes with my digestion.  
To be or not to be, that is the question?

Marry me in my soldier's suit, or not at all. What sayest thou?"

"Oh, hae't yer ain stiff way, Corporal Dick, an' there's the end o't. But if ye're to be marrit in yer sodjer's claes, I'll come in my printed short-goon."

"All right, I'm willing," said the old soldier, and then he gallantly kissed his betrothed on the left cheek with a smack like the report of a percussion cap, and called her his brave soldier lassie.

And thus the affair was, so far, amicably settled, and things looked all serene for the gallant old soldier.

Now, there lived and laboured in the East-end of Glasgow at that time a certain witty and worthy old-fashioned Cameronian preacher of the very plain and practical school, called the Rev. David Gregg.

Now, the Rev. David Gregg was both wise and witty in his way, and was sometimes original to a point in his interpretation of the knotty bits of Scripture. His stipend was small, but he substantially added to it by hiring himself out for the consummation of marriages in humble life. In this way, when the marrying season was on, he used to go out of an evening and tie the knots in regular rotation, much after the fashion of a medical man making his calls on the sick.

Accordingly, the Rev. David Gregg was very naturally

fixed on by Washin' Jean for the performance of the marriage ceremony.

The business was a very quiet affair. Jean, with strange taste, had insisted on being "married in her short-goon," so as to be upsides with Corporal Dick in his sodger's claes, as she said. But over and above that she had an arrow of sarcasm hidden in her bow which the gallant old Waterloo man suspected not.

Everything being ready and the minister on the ground, the reverend gentleman said, addressing the old pensioner—

"Will you take this woman to be your wife?"

"Yes, I will," gallantly answered Corporal Dick, standing all the while at strict "attention."

"And will you have this man for your husband?" he next asked Washin' Jean.

"No, I will not!" replied Jean, with quick emphasis.

"And why not?" asked the astonished minister.

"I have tooken a scunner at him!" replied the washer-wife, with a contemptuous cast of her head.

Poor Corporal Dick, including the minister, and the half-dozen witnessing friends, were astounded, shocked, flabbergasted.

The minister, however, was quite equal to the occasion. Without a word of comment, he claimed his fee, picked up his hat, and hurriedly left the house.

The old soldier was sadly taken down over the business. He expostulated with his stout bride to little apparent purpose. At last she said—

"Only if ye tak' aff yer ridiculous sodger's claes will I consent to be yours."

"Then thou art already mine!" Corporal Dick joyfully exclaimed, rubbing his hands gleefully together. "Off comes the military suit!"

That same night the minister was again requisitioned to

come back and tie the knot, and, true to his agreement, he once more turned up.

This time, to make things sure, the reverend gentleman applied himself to the woman first.

"Are you willing to have this man for your husband?" he solemnly asked.

"Yes, I am," distinctly answered Washin' Jean this time, smiling gleefully at the thought of her late triumph.

"And are you willing to take this woman for your wife?" once more asked the minister, glad to have got successfully over the initial difficulty.

"No, I am not," boldly replied the old soldier.

"And why, sir?" again asked the minister.

"I have taken a scunner at her!" answered Corporal Dick, with an erect head.

On went the Rev. David Gregg's clerical hat once more, and pocketing his fee for the second time, he set off from the house as hurriedly as before.

Washin' Jean, who had thus been paid back with a smart Roland-for-an-Oliver, was furious, and all but drove the tricky old pensioner out of her house with the kitchen poker.

The comic affair got wind in the neighbourhood, and was much and merrily laughed over.

Time heals the deepest wounds, however, and scarce three days had elapsed when the graphic old pair had kissed and 'greed again, like all true lovers worthy of the name.

The minister was once more interviewed, and was at length induced to attend at the house on the succeeding evening, so as to have the delayed marriage-knot firmly and finally tied.

And at this point the humour of the funny incident becomes intensified.

All was once more ready, and the happy pair were all but made one, when the minister once more began with the usual questions, addressed first to the man.

“Are you now willing to take this woman for your wife?”

“Yes, I certainly am,” firmly replied the gallant old Waterloo man, standing at the military salute.

“And are you willing to have this man for your husband?” he asked at Washin’ Jean.

“Yes, I am,” distinctly answered the stout washer wife, with a delicious curtsey, specially rehearsed for the interesting occasion.

“Then I refuse to marry you!” firmly put in the witty old clergyman.

“Why?” cried the pair in chorus.

“Because I have taken a wholesome scunner at both of you!” he quickly answered, and, snatching up his shovel hat, he clapped it on his head and hurried off, with a smile on his reverend face as broad as the Clyde at Dumbarton.

The trio were thus satisfactorily avenged all round, each having paid off the other with a similar Roland-for-an-Oliver cut. Matters thus squared, it seemed but the just dues of everybody interested in the issue to see the perplexing matter satisfactorily adjusted all round, and the comic pair amicably settled in life.

Suffice to say, that before next quarterly pension-day, Washin’ Jean and the gallant Corporal Dick were happily made one flesh, and lived to “fa’ oot an’ ’gree again,” like ither happily-married couples, for long and many a day thereafter.

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