

"SWEET ALICE, BEN BOLT"

A Chat with the Author of a Famous Old Song.

Has George Du Maurier made Congressman Thomas Dunn English, of Newark, N. J., famous; or has the congressman lifted the English novelist and caricaturist to a higher pinnacle of fame?

This seems to be the burning literary problem of the day. In Du Maurier's last novel "Trilby," which is having such a sale, the song, "Ben Bolt," is echoed and re-echoed throughout. It has even been claimed that fair Alice of the song furnished the theme of the story.

However this may be, it is certain that the work of the Newarker, first published half a century ago, is once more on everybody's tongue, and if Du Maurier, as is stated, was not aware of the author of "Ben Bolt," when he penned "Trilby," he has learned who he is by this time. Dr. English, for he practiced medicine early in life, receives the sudden onslaught of fame very modestly and good-naturedly. He has devoted himself to proclaiming free trade as a democratic representative in congress of late, and it may be a pleasant diversion from politics to literature, no matter how abrupt the change. At any rate, he talked in an interesting and entertaining manner to a local interviewer the other day, who called at his home.

He is an old man. You see that at a glance. His clothes hang loosely and carelessly on a frame that shows the wear and tear of a busy life. There are many, very many lines on his face; lines that thought and study and care have had more to do with the digging than his 75 years. He was born June 29, 1819, in Philadelphia. Then he has a trick of looking straight at you, but you do not "catch his eye." This is because his sight is bad. Without his glasses he hardly sees at all. But his voice is strong and musical, winning, and when he talks, you like to listen to him.

There was a copy of his poems among the litter on the table.

"This," he said, opening the volume, "has been published by subscription. As you will see, it is edited by my daughter, Alice. It contains 'Ben Bolt' as it was originally written in 1843, and was published for the first time in the New York *Mirror*. In its travels it has met with some hard knocks, like its father, and there have been many mutilations of its lines.

"I have seen the use made of 'Ben Bolt' in Du Maurier's novel, 'Trilby,' went on the Doctor, "and it is by no means to my liking. But, after all, what does it matter?"

He laughed and went on: "All this controversy about the author of 'Ben Bolt' and the British assumption that he must have been a Briton is surprising to me. Now let me read you this:"

The Doctor took up a copy of "Trilby." "Its harmonies in the playing of Svengali," he read, "were all magnified into a strange, almost holy, poetic dignity and splendor quite undreamed of by whoever wrote the words and music of that unsophisticated little song, which has touched so many simple British hearts that don't know any better—and among them one, that of the present scribe—long, long ago."

The Doctor laid down the book. "Now," he said, "had any one read 'Ben Bolt' carefully and intelligently they would have seen that it was written by an American."

"Why?"

"I will tell you. There are certain words in the poem that could only have been written by an American. The word 'slab' which appears in the first stanza is an Americanism. It is not used in England. Then, again, 'hickory tree' is used. There are no hickory trees in England known by that name. When an Englishman speaks of a hickory tree he calls it an oak."

Then the doctor grew reminiscent.

"When I first floated in Congress on the democratic tidal wave," he said, "some of the newspapers, speaking of the newly elected member, fell back on my literary record and dragged 'Ben Bolt' from its lurking place. The result of this was a sort of 'Ben Bolt' revival through the country, but a source of great annoyance to me.

"I was assured by one member of the House that his wife had won him years ago by the pretty and pathetic manner in which she had sung 'Ben Bolt' to him. Another told me that, like Dr. Coan in the Sandwich Islands, his mother had sung him to sleep with 'Ben Bolt,' and, to cap the climax, I was introduced to a lady who had been christened 'Alice Ben Bolt.'

"Who was the lady, Doctor?"

"She was the daughter of Gen. Pickett, of Confederate fame."

"Whenever I got into a mood of indignation at some legislation adverse to my views," he went on in his musical way, "and expressed my indignation in strong and perhaps emphatic terms, some of the members would clap me on the back and say:

"Don't you remember sweet Alice, Ben Bolt?"

Sweet Alice, whose hair was so brown?

"This would put me in a rage. 'Confound it! I have often said, I begin to wish that either 'Ben Bolt' or I had never been born.'"

And then the genial poet, journalist, physician and statesman saw his visitor to the door with true old fashioned politeness.

THE DISCREET COLLECTOR.

Down South there is a curio shop

Unknown to many men;

Thereat do I intend to stop

When I am South again.

The narrow street through which to go,

Aha! I know it well!

And maybe you would like to know,

But no, I will not tell!

'Tis there to find the loveliest plates,

The bluest of the blue,

At such surprisingly low rates

You'd not believe it true;

And there is one Napoleon vase

Of dainty Sevres to sell;

I'm sure you'd like to know that place,

But no, I will not tell!

Then, too, I know another shop

Has old, old beds for sale,

With lovely testers up on top

Carved in ornate detail;

And there are sideboards rich and rare,

With fronts that proudly swell,

Oh, there are bargains waiting there,

But where I will not tell!

And hark! I know a bottle man

Smiling and debonair,

And he has promised me I can

Choose of his precious ware!

In age and shape and color, too,

His dainty goods excel;

Aha, my friends, if you but knew,

But so! I will not tell!

A thousand other shops I know

Where bargains can be got,

Where other folk would like to go

Who have what I have not.

I let them hunt; I hold my mouth,

Yes, though I know full well

Where lie the treasures of the South,

I'm not a-going to tell!

—EUGENE FIELD.

BACKGROUNDS.

She sat before an easel, with her head tipped lightly so,

A paint brush in her fingers, idly trailing to and fro;

I stood quite close beside her, with a wildly beating heart,

And praised with reckless ardor, her proficiency in art.

How sweet she was, and dainty! How I loved her! I declare

It seemed to me no other girl could be one-half so fair,

As she sat there, leaning forward, in the gracefulest of poses,

And deftly put a back ground in a plaque of yellow roses.

Ah, that was many years ago; dear girl, I love her still;

I love her smiles and dimples, and admire the wondrous skill

Of her dainty, snowy fingers—I've been watching them to-night

Move to and fro above the work she's been holding to the light—

And, thinking of that other day, I doze a bit, perchance,

As she deftly puts a background into Jimmie's other "pants."