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Judge Ripper's Day

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When Nadine and I drove through the gate into Greenwood County Park, hundreds of cars already were parked and behind us were cars lined up, bumper to bumper, to a bend in the road about a mile away. How far beyond this bend the line extended we didn’t know, for we couldn’t see. Impatient drivers were honking their horns for cars up front to move on into the park grounds, so they could move up for the big day.

"Some turnout for the retirement of the Solemn Old Judge," I said. "I can remember when I was a boy he was called ‘Rip, the Ripper.’ And he couldn’t have been named after Rip Van Winkle, for the Solemn Old Judge wasn’t so solemn when he was a younger man. He was up hoeing in his garden at six in the morning. He always liked to use a hoe to chop weeds and hoe vegetables and flowers.”

"Yes," Nadine recalled, "we liyed across the street from him. I remember Judge Ripper always was hoeing in the garden as my father went to work.”

"And, you see, the early bird got the worm," I said. "Look how long he has served as circuit judge!”

When an usher had guided us into a place to park, we got out and looked at the throng of people gathered over on the bank of Big River. The river is the northern boundary of our twenty acres of Greenwood County Park.

"The Solemn Old Judge is already over there," the usher told us. "He’s been here since daylight. You know he gets out early and he gets there in a hurry!”

"Yes, but who’s up in that big elm over there?" I asked.
"Must be the Solemn Old Judge Ripper," he said.
"But what’s he doing up in a tree?" I asked.

There must have been five hundred people gathered in a circle around the tree looking up at the man whose long, thin white hair rode on the June morning wind that blew up Big River—rode like a man’s white undershirt flapping on a clothesline. Nadine and I hur-
ried across the park to join the outer rim of the circle of people gathered around and under the big elm. We crowded up just like all the others who were hurrying to be a part of Judge Ripper's Day.

It was Judge Ripper up there in the big tree, all right. Two pulleys had been fastened to a big branch in the top of the elm and they came down and fastened to a rocking chair on which sat our Solemn Old Judge. Two men worked the pulley ropes, lifting our judge up a few inches at a time.

"What in the world is going on here?" I whispered to Mort Perry who was standing beside me. "What's he doing up in that tree?"

"Ah, just getting up there where the people can see him, I reckon," Mort replied in a low tone. "You know, he's been a most unusual judge. He began to wear them big ribbon neckties before anybody else did. He got everybody's attention focused on himself until they forgot all about the trial. Just to look at him sitting up in his judge's seat would make people think he was trying to be God Almighty on his throne."

"Gather up closer to me, my friends," Judge Ripper said in a soft voice that somehow carried out a long way. "Come under the sound of my voice, as I will have no gavel today. I am no longer your circuit judge. The Day of Reckoning has come to me on this Earthly Footstool. Old age has overtaken me, as it will overtake everybody who stands down there and listens to the sound of my voice. I will no longer wield that gavel and you will no longer hearken to the sound of my voice. My days of administering justice in the Greenwood County courtroom are over. You have elected me to eight terms of office!"

"Your honor, Judge Ripper, I beg to correct your statement," spoke a voice down among us, though on the other side of the tree from Nadine and me. "You have served Greenwood County as our Most Honorable Circuit Judge for nine terms, six years for each term, which makes fifty-four years."

"You are correct and I am correct, my friend, Daffy Perkins," the Judge replied. "But I was elected by the people only eight times. I will explain this to you today as I am lifted higher in this tree. But I have served you, my honorable constituents, fifty-four years, as Daffy Perkins has told you. There are many things I wish to say on my last appearance before you.

"Today I appear before you an honest man. Time is fleeting, and with each minute I am nearer the grave. When Death's cold icy
fingers grab me by the throat and I depart this life, I want to leave an honest Will and Testament to my fellow man, to my constituents, who have been so kind to me, regardless of what I have done to them.”

Above us, our Solemn Old Judge, with his windblown white hair, still had the frigid air of the Solemn Old Judge that we had known so long and feared as much as we would fear the appearance of Old Beelzebug among us. His face was pale, his nose long and sharp at the tip, almost like a hatchet with a blunt edge. His cold blue eyes that looked down upon us were similar to those of a predatory hawk. He was wearing the rose-colored ribbon tie, which fluttered up there in the wind like a flag. He wore a black funeral suit. His coat had a pencil, fountain pen, and spectacle case in its front pocket. His long legs dangled, encased in wrinkled black pants, and he was wearing black high-top lace shoes with sharp-pointed toes. Across his middle, from arm to arm of the rocking chair, a broad sash which looked like it might be a quilt or a blanket was tied securely so that when and if our Solemn Old Judge Ripper leaned against it, he wouldn’t fall out of his last judge’s seat.

“No, it won’t be long before your judge will have to stand before God’s Great Judgment Seat and be judged,” he said. “This thing of judgment is a serious matter, I realize now more than at any other time of my life. I know it because maturity has come to me as the years have passed. My days of judging men and women, boys and girls, have passed because the lengthening shadow of time has spread over my world. Before I reach the Great Judgment Day, I must make a few confessions to you.”

More people had come, joining the outer rim of the circle of Judge Ripper’s friends and followers and those who had come, perhaps, to jeer at him because of some of the decisions he had made. More than a thousand stood jam-packed in a wagon-wheel circle under and beyond the giant elm with a half-acre spread. Judge Ripper had selected the right tree, where he could look down from his rocking chair on the faces, both familiar and unfamiliar, looking up at him. He had chosen this giant tree among the smaller trees as a symbol comparable to his being the human giant among his constituents living in Greenwood County, which constituted the limitations of his judgeship for the past fifty-four years.

“Last December 31 I served my last day,” he spoke down to the eager faces packed in the wagon-wheel circle beneath him. “I have waited for this first day of June, which brings the fairest weather and
plenty of green leaves to our fair county-seat town of Blakesburg, where our courthouse and our seat of justice is, and where I have served you over half a century.

"Do I hear the hum of whispering down there? I have no gavel today. You must get quiet and listen to what I have to say. My voice is not what it used to be, not with the wind blowing up here and with the rustling leaves all around me. I cannot talk against this wind in the leaves. They are trying to speak to me while I am trying to speak to you. We must let the wind and the leaves make noise, while you silence yourselves down there."

"All quiet down here, Your Honor," said Willie Potter. "Go ahead! We want to hear what you have to say."

"First, I must confess to you that Ripper is not my real name," he said. "I gave up a better name than Ripper. My real name is John Jamison, a very old pioneer name in Greenwood County. It's not Honest John, Big John, Good Old John, or Father John Ripper, either. All these prefixes to my first name were added in an earlier day to woo the voters. Honest John is a good name to get votes. And, of course, Father John came when I was running for circuit judge beyond retirement age. I was old enough to be the father of ninety per cent of this county's population."

"Tell us how you got the name Ripper, Your Honor," said a woman looking up from the crowd.

The hissing sound of low whispers was going through the crowd beneath the tree: "Well, I never knew that!" "I always thought his name was Ripper." "Well, I knew his name was Jamison," whispered an old man. "But I never norated the story, for he's a man of my party." "What's the matter with him?" whispered another old man. "It's better to let sleeping dogs lie. He must be in his dotage to make such a confession and ruin our party." And there were more whispers, mingled together in an indecipherable profusion of words.

"Order down there," said the Solemn Old Judge. "This is my day, and I want to speak the truth. Now, quiet, so I can tell you how I got the name Ripper!"

A stillness came over the crowd.

"As a young attorney in Blakesburg, I was both a schemer and a dreamer," our Solemn Old Judge continued. "I had ambitions of being circuit judge. But in those days, Greenwood and Lantern counties were joined in one judicial circuit. Since Lantern County had enough plurality of votes in the minority party to elect a circuit
judge, I got another idea. I ran for representative of Greenwood County, where the only election I had to watch was the primary in my own party. I had a battle in my party, but I came through with flying colors, while the man we ran for circuit judge, Lawyer Ephraim Gullett, who has long been dead and gone to his reward, was defeated by a prominent attorney of Blakesburg, Oder Timmons. Now Oder Timmons, too, has gone to his reward.

“My friends, I have to pause a minute here,” continued our Solemn Old Judge, as he pulled a leaf from the elm, took the pencil from his front coat pocket and laid the leaf on the rocking chair arm. “I shall write the name Oder Timmons on this leaf,” he said. “I’ll write it on the white belly of the leaf, where it will be legible. And here it goes.” He threw the leaf to the wind and the wind carried it away.

“I’ll say for Oder Timmons he was a fine lawyer, an honest and good man. He was old enough to be my father. I had gone to him when I was a very young lawyer, for we had graduated from the law school at State University. He was an experienced Blakesburg lawyer when I hung out my shingle. He helped me like a father would help a son. But I had my dreams, and I couldn’t help doing what I did, though I knew it would be extra expense to our state, which has suffered from poor economy for more than a century. Oder Timmons was elected circuit judge of Lantern and Greenwood counties, but I knew he would never serve. Why had I fought through a long, hard primary in my party to be elected representative of our county?

“My constituents thought I would get better roads for them, and buildings in the state park, as I had promised,” he continued. “But the first thing I did when I got to the legislature was to present a ripper bill to make a new district. I’m the one who separated Greenwood and Lantern counties. I knew if I told our boys in the legislature, a majority of two to one over the minority party, that I’d vote for anything they asked me to vote for and would ask for nothing in return—no roads, no building for the state park—they’d tallyho for any bill. How could it be otherwise when the governor and I were classmates? Now, when we sent Oder Timmons from our Greenwood County, where he was born and grew to manhood to become circuit judge of Lantern County, who do you think Governor Boston appointed? Not Ephraim Gullett who had been defeated. I was the man appointed.

“Excuse me a minute until I write old Ephraim’s name on a leaf and toss it to the wind! Good old Eef! He lived fourteen years after
that defeat and double cross, and died of a broken heart. He always thought he had been betrayed, and he worked hard against me when I ran the first time. I was barely elected, but by being a good party man, I kept my election pluralities gaining from 'Big John,' 'Honest John,' 'Father John' to the 'Solemn Old Judge.' When I came to be your 'Solemn Old Judge,' no man dared run against me.”

"Your Honor, why did you write Oder Timmons and Ephraim Gyllett's names on the leaves and toss them to the wind?" asked a man with a sun spot on his face where sunlight had filtered through the leaves.

"Are we not as grass?" Judge Ripper asked. "Don't even the lawyer and the circuit judge pass and are forgotten like the rest? Aren't we leaves on the wind? As I now look upon the past, I wonder just how fit I was to judge the people after routing Oiler Timmons from his county, which was my county and your county, and he must have loved this county then the same as we do now. And, then, look at what I did to Ephraim Gullett! No wonder he accused me of betrayal. He was in line for appointment as judge of the newly created district. So, it was he or it was Oder Timmons who named me Judge Ripper, and it went from constituent to constituent until I became Judge Ripper. By having one name consume the other name and by due process of law, I discarded Jamison, my real name, and I accepted the name Ripper that the people had given me. I have found it better, dear friends, to obey the wishes and desires of the people if I wanted to stay in office, and I did!"

"Honorable Judge, I never knew your real name was Jamison," said a man standing very close to me. "I have always believed your name was Ripper. I didn't know you inherited your name by such devious methods!"

"Well, I did, and I think of the promises I made to the people about bringing them better roads back there in 1963 and when I ran for the office of representative," he said. "I never got one foot of road for them. I can tell you now that the mind of the voter is fickle. He wants a promise. And he accepts a promise and votes for it even when he knows he'll never get it. In my younger days, I was a climbing man. I had dreams of being appointed to the State Court and maybe, if I were lucky, to the Supreme Court of the United States."

"Your Honor, that was not an honorable thing to do to Oder Timmons, even if he was not in your majority party," spoke the man who had asked him the last question. "And you did betray Ephraim Gul-
lett, the man in your majority party who ran against Mr. Timmons and lost.”

“I admit to all you have said,” Judge Ripper replied as his rocking chair rocked and his long white hair rode on the wind like a horse’s flaxen mane w. n he runs to meet a blowing wind. “Today I sit above you, an honest man looking down upon you! And this day is just beginning for me. Will you call off the names to me, Cyrus?”

“Your Honor, shall I call off the names beginning with your first term in the spring of 1964?”

“Yes, begin with the beginning,” he replied. “See, I’ve explained about my name and how I became the youngest circuit judge ever to sit on the bench. I was twenty-eight when I became circuit judge of this district, which was before many of you were born. I am now eighty-two and when a man becomes my age, when he is so near the last and final judgment by the Great Master Judge, it is time for him to confess and be an honest man. I cannot face my Great Judge until I have made these confessions to you, my friends and my former constituents.” Our Solemn Old Judge Ripper stopped briefly to clear his throat with a feeble cough. Then he continued, “Of course, it is impossible to mention all the men, women, boys, and girls I have passed sentence on or have given instructions to the juries who have passed judgment. I shall mention a few of the many, those I was never sure about and those where I leaned a little for personal gain.”

“Has he lost his mind?” said Bailey Elswick. He was our sheriff of Greenwood County. “He’ll ruin our majority party.”

“I heard what you said, Bailey Elswick,” Judge Ripper spoke up in a high voice. “Don’t worry about our majority party in this state and all the other southern states. It has been tried. It has been killed, cooked, and eaten, but never digested. It comes to life and is as good as new. I used to think it would hurt when our majority party was disowned by other areas of our great country. But torn into parts, our party always got back with the others before a state or national election. And we became a living, united whole again, ready for another assault on the helpless minority party. We always rode the Victory Horse. The minority party’s horse we named Defeat.”

“All right, Your Honor. The first name on this scroll is Willie Allcorn.”

“Convicted on circumstantial evidence and given life for cutting Horam Gullett’s throat with a razor,” he said. “Two others could have been guilty of this hideous crime. But I was a young judge then.
No votes were subtracted from me when I passed sentence, for he belonged to the minority party. Bear with me, dear friends, while I pull this leaf!"

When the Solemn Old Judge wrote "Willie Allcorn" on the leaf, he spelled the name for all to hear. "Poor old Willie grew old and died in the pen, and may God rest his soul." He threw the leaf on the wind and it went sailing above the treetops and over Big River. Our judge watched the leaf until it disappeared, and then he said, "That's the way of man. He's here, a leaf, a blade of grass today and he's withered and gone tomorrow. Not any decision can be wrongfully right or rightfully wrong. Who ever hears of Willie Allcorn today?"

"Your Honor, only I," spoke a feminine voice below. "I am his granddaughter, and my father, God rest his soul, always said his father died in the pen and was never guilty of the crime of which he was accused."

"No one is sure whether he was or not," said our Solemn Old Judge Ripper. "He might not have been, and he might have been. But I write his name on a leaf from the tree of life, since I am not sure."

"But what you are doing is crazy, Your Honor," protested Sheriff Elswick. "You are young and party-minded," the judge said. "Wrong decisions, getting what we think is somewhere too fast by any means to an end doesn't pay. This trying men in newspapers for crimes they are merely accused of doesn't pay."

"Judge, I belong to the minority party, and I just came here today to be coming," said Mike Hansford. "But I'm glad I came. I'm glad you're doing this. It takes a big man to do what you are doing!"

"Thank you, Mike Hansford," the judge said. "The world has changed so much with so many people in it that it is so much with us now we had better play life's game with honest intentions."

"Your Honor, are you ready for another name?"

"Yes, Cyrus, I am."

The voice was familiar to me. I looked around the tree, and there stood Cyrus Middleton, reading off the names to the judge. He had served forty years as Greenwood County Circuit Court Clerk. He was the man who put the jurors' names in a wheel, turned the wheel, and took out the names. He had been accused by many in both parties of stacking the jury with names that would either convict a man or clear him, whatever happened to be the wish of the judge,
the party, or those in power. He was wearing a tight-fitted checkered suit and a ribbon tie like Judge Ripper wore. He always had been a close friend of our judge.

"Your Honor, George Felty."

"I regret very much that George Felty died on the hot seat," Judge Ripper said. "It was proved that he killed Buzz Johnson . . . a trial I will never forget. But life was dear to him, even if he had taken a life. And had he been sentenced to life, he would have been punished more by thinking of the crime he had done."

Then our Solemn Old Judge Ripper wrote George Felty's name on a leaf and tossed it on the wind. The leaf turned over and over, just as thoughts of murder must have turned over in Felty's mind and thoughts of his sentence had turned over in Judge Ripper's mind.

"Will you please hoist my chair up so I can reach more leaves?" Judge Ripper asked.

His attendants on the ground pulled the rocking chair up by pulley ropes to another cluster of leaves.

"Reckon there'll be enough leaves on that tree for him to write all the names he has sentenced?" asked an elderly woman standing near Nadine and me.

"No, there won't be enough leaves on that big elm for all the people he's sentenced," said an elderly man standing near her.

"Another name, Cyrus," said our Solemn Old Judge, who was now perched higher in the tree. "We must move along faster if we get to all the names listed on that scroll."

"Walt Whitfield."

"Sentenced to three years for nonsupport of wife and seven children," the judge said. "Three children didn't belong to him, since another man stayed there, too. His wife, old Effie, should have been sentenced."

"Janice Traylor, for killing her husband, Bill, with a butcher knife. I commuted her sentence, since she was the mother of two children. She should have served."

He scribbled her name on a leaf and threw it to the wind.

"Now, Janice has been judged by the Supreme Judge, for she has gone to her reward. Cyrus, please keep the names coming."

Well, there were many names read by Cyrus from the scroll and many leaves tossed by Judge Ripper's cadaverous hand from the elm tree, which represented the Tree of Life to our Solemn Old Judge. These leaves brought comments, sighs, and cries from the crowd be-
neath. A fight started, but Sheriff Elswick put an end to it. I never heard anything like the confusion beneath the elm. Maybe the people got tired of standing, but they wouldn’t leave. They waited to hear the next name called, and there were many called, written on leaves, and tossed to the wind—leaves for only those who now had gone with the wind from Greenwood County, which had been their Tree of Life, to their last resting places in Greenwood County earth, in prison burial grounds, state or federal, and in potter’s field.

Names recorded on leaves and tossed to the wind included Worldly Fritz, possessing illegal licker; Dudley Kearns, armed robbery; Aleck Chaffin, shooting his brother-in-law; Moonie Cotswold, six times at close range with intent to kill; Mary Pennix, accessory to armed robbery; Pert Pennix, armed robbery; Cottle Abrahams, detaining a female against her will; Wilford Seymour, carnal knowledge of a female under sixteen; Thaddeus Stevens, stabbing with intent to kill; Roscoe Blevins, breaking and entering; Benton Remines, third offense of making illegal whiskey; and other names for similar offenses—Don Sibene, Redbelly Seagraves, Arnold MacNutt, Dollie Stump, Martin Hillsdale, Ernest Howard, Wiley Wilson. He went on calling names as he pulled leaves from the elm and recorded their names for the wind. When leaves around him were used, his attendants below hoisted his rocking chair up to new clusters. There was a hole up through the center of the elm where all the leaves were plucked clean. Now our Solemn Old Judge Ripper was climbing higher and higher up into his Tree of Life. And the wind continued to blow up Big River, the usual direction from which the winds and the rains came.

"Boy, am I tired," said Art Mullins. "It’s awful interesting to hear His Honor, Judge Ripper, call them names and tell what they have done and say what he thinks about them now. Maybe his successor, Honorable Clifford Harper, ought to have one of these tree-settings once a year and invite all his constituents out to hear him. Maybe it would be better for the law."

All the time Art was mumbling his words to the man who stood beside him, our Solemn Old Judge was spelling out more names and recording names on leaves for the wind to carry hither and thither over Big River and up the valley.

"What does it matter that their names are written on leaves now?" said a young woman standing near Art Mullins. "They are gone with the wind. They have served their sentences. They have no stones with recorded names and dates. How much will recording their names on
But His Honor, our Solemn Old Judge Ripper, is making an open confession," said a woman over beside the tree. "Open confessions are good for the soul."

"If I were in his shoes when I stood before the Master to be judged, I'd have fears," Art Mullins said. "I've never been anything but a farm laborer, but I won't have to answer for what he did to Ephraim Gullett and Oder Timmons. Think back in the middle of the twentieth century! Ah, his sins have found him out. His soul is hungry and crying. I hope he will come clean, and God will rest his soul when he comes to that final judgment all men must face."

"My ears are good, and I heard that, Mr. Mullins," Judge Ripper raised his feeble voice from midway up in the elm. "And you, sir, are exactly right. But it is not too late for a man to get forgiveness for his mistakes. It is good that he can recognize his mistakes and make his confessions before the kin of those he wonders about wonder about some of his decisions, and know that some of them were made because of other pressures and interests, party affiliations, and other things of the day and time of their trials."

"Judge, I admire you for what you are doing," Art said. "But I can't stand here and listen, for I weigh 215 pounds, my shoes are hurting my feet, and I'm hungry."

"Go eat, Mr. Mullins, rest yourself and return," he said. "I'll be going strong here all the day with the list of names on the scroll that must get a leaf from this Tree of Life. All right, another name, Cyrus."

"Nadine, I'm tired of standing," I said. "I'm hungry, too, like my friend, Art Mullins. Let's go eat and rest and come back! I see that is what others are doing."

Still there were as many around the tree as come to Blakesburg when we have a street carnival. Nadine and I walked back to the car, where we still could hear Judge Ripper reading names as he sent them away on currents of wind.

We drove down to Blakesburg and ate in Pennington's Cafe. I was tired enough to drop, too, but I still could see and hear our Solemn Old Judge up in that tree. His ripper bill, introduced in the middle of the twentieth century, just to redistrict a county to give himself a position, at extra expense to our state, would never die. Not even in the year of 2019 A.D.
"Nadine, as soon as we are rested enough, I want us to go back to the park to see if our Solemn Old Judge Ripper will still be up in that elm," I said.

"You know he will," she said. "I don’t see much use of going back there and hearing the names of those sentenced and seeing him write another name on a leaf and throw it to the wind. I don’t see the point of standing under that tree in that curious crowd of lookers and listeners. But I'll go back with you if you feel compelled to return."

"I'll bet he's got a hole cleaned nearly to the top of that giant elm by now," I said. "Think of that, won't you! There's never been another day here like this one. It will be talked about after our Solemn Old Judge Ripper has been judged by the Great Judge and when he sleeps out on Lonesome Hill with a tall stone, maybe twenty feet high, above his final resting place."

"He'll run into a problem on Lonesome Hill," said Nadine. "Will his name on the stone be Jamison or Ripper?"

"I can't answer that," I said. "Let's get back to the park. It's getting late in the afternoon."

Back inside the park, we parked and looked over to the elm. There sat Judge Ripper in his rocking chair almost at the top of the tree. All the leaves up through the center of the tree that had been in reaching distance of the Judge's long arms had been plucked. A great crowd was still gathered beneath the tree, and the sun was setting.

"Well, I see you're back," Art Mullins said. "We went away, ate lunch, but I had to come back. I can't forget this, can you?"

"No, I can't," I said. "How much longer will it go on?"

"Until all the names on the scroll are read," Art said.

"Where is he with the names now?" I asked.

"Up in the twenty-first century," he replied. "There's been fighting here. Relatives of the people whose names he's read off are here. Sheriff Elswick has had to call in a couple of his deputies to help him handle the situation."

The barren branches up through the center of the tree gave us a good view of Solemn Judge Ripper reaching up toward the topmost twigs, pulling the last leaves he would be able to reach as the names were called. We heard names called. We watched people pushing and shoving and heard them swearing at each other in the crowd beneath the tree.

"I've been here all day," said Bonnie Madden. "I've waited to hear
the name of my husband called. Don't guess his going to the pen and spending ten years of his life for a crime he didn't do was important enough for Judge Ripper to consider. I feel like going over there and cutting one of the ropes and letting the chair fall with him."

"You just try that, lady," Sheriff Elswick said. "Clear out now before I arrest you."

Solemn Old Judge Ripper was calling off names—Carrie Dravenstot, Marshall Sprouse, Winnie Skaggis, Arville Deer, Charlie Coon, and Denton Kirby.

"And now call no more names," Judge Ripper called down to Cyrus. "I am pulling the last leaf. This leaf is for myself. The sun has set. It's time to come down."

Our Solemn Old Judge Ripper pulled the last leaf from the topmost twig he could reach and began to spell his name. We listened to see how he would spell it. And he spelled it out loudly for us to hear: "J-u-d-g-e J-o-h-n R-i-p-p-e-r." Then he looked down to us and said, "It's the name I've earned. I know it's false, but there's no escape now."

He threw the leaf on the wind and at that time a great gust, like wind before rain, came up Big River Valley and swept the leaf out over Big River. We watched it zigzagging on the wind-swirl until it was a speck, and on and out of sight.

"That's the way it is, my friends," Judge Ripper said. "Lower my rocking chair."

When his attendants let the chair to the ground and Cyrus untied the sash, our Solemn Old Judge stood up.

"My day is over," he said. "You have seen and heard. I have no gavel to dismiss you. I have only the sound of my voice. You are dismissed. Go in peace and administer honesty and justice to your fellowman, so that when you stand before the Supreme Judge, you will not shake and quiver. Good-by and good luck to all of you."

Widely recognized as a writer of stories about his native state of Kentucky, Jesse Stuart has published 29 books, the best known of which is Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow. A poet, short story writer, novelist and educator, his new novel, Daughter of the Legend, is scheduled for publication this autumn by McGraw-Hill. As teacher and writer, he has traveled in 54 countries and resided in Scotland and Egypt. His permanent residence is in Greenup, Kentucky.