

THE OLD LADY SHOWS HER VERSES

By Vera Palmer

INTO my office, in the distant corner of the editorial room of a southern newspaper, recently tripped an old lady. She is not one of those flower-like retiring old ladies (so seldom seen in this twentieth century); she is very “active” in a number of organizations, serving on countless committees in her

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little country town not far distant. In her hand was a small parcel.

It turned out to be a present which she was bringing to me, all done up in tissue paper and lavender ribbons; just what might be expected from a woman of her venerable years. Before handing over the gift, the dear old soul explained that it was a book she had lately read; a volume of poetry containing at least a hundred verses. It seemed she loved poetry and had always read a great deal, and, if I would pardon her apparent conceit, knew herself to be something of a judge in that line.

This poem, however, was altogether a different matter. Even the name of the author was unknown to her and, in fact, it had a decidedly foreign sound. She had been skeptical always of all importations. Then, too, its metre and its morals were confusing, although there was certainly an undeniable fascination about the thing.

Knowing me to be a bit of an intruder into the reviewer's column, my elderly caller urged me to accept the strange little volume still enwrapped in its spotless whiteness. There was one condition attached, a kind of string as it were; I was to read it carefully and give her my candid opinion. Many of the "verses" she thought

quite "pretty", but then, she admitted with a deprecating smile, she was no real critic.

If the entire book proved to be absolutely worthless in my judgment, I was so to inform the good lady with equal candor, but she would appreciate it if I would refrain from revealing her lack of discernment to the members of her social, historical, and philanthropic world.

I was becoming nervous. What vacuous bunkum or decadent translation was to be placed within reach of my spotless hands, later to cast its vitiating influence on my unbesmirched brain?

Then the insidious or meaningless thing was passed to me. With fingers well nigh trembling with excitement and curiosity I found myself untying the lavender ribbons and withdrawing the tissue paper. There, to my astonishment, lay a little limp-leather book about four inches long by two and a half wide. It was bound in dark brown and the inner sides of the back were of bright green moire silk. On its right side it bore in bold and gilded lettering the name of our old familiar friend which we meet anew with un-failing regularity the twenty fifth day of each December; the "Rubaiyat" of our quotable and companionable Omar!