

1957

The Hon. Sir William Rann Kennedy

Vanity Fair

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JUDGES. No. 43.

THE HON. SIR WILLIAM RANN KENNEDY.

HE is a young Judge of seven-and-forty years, who became the eldest son of a country parson under a lucky star. Full of unjudicial weakness despite his education at Eton, and at King's College (of which he was a Fellow), and at Pembroke, Cambridge (whence he graduated Senior Classic just thirty years ago), he has got on well, yet does he not greatly adorn the Bench. It was not until eight years after he left Cambridge that he got himself called to the Bar; but he did other work in the meantime, being for a year or so Private Secretary to the President of the Poor Law Board, and other things. When he did get called he went the Northern Circuit, and presently married a daughter of the Royal Academician, George Richmond. As a junior, he took pains in his profession, worked hard, and showed an earnestness that commended him as a careful trustee of his clients' interests. When he took silk eight years ago, he took little else, except at Liverpool, where he had a considerable practice in commercial and shipping cases. He has more ability than that with which he has been generally credited, for as a Queen's Counsel of three years' standing he was offered an Indian Judgeship, but, thinking better of himself than other men thought of him, he declined the offer with thanks, on the very real ground, no doubt, that he was born to better things. And his sense was justified last year when a grateful Gladstonian Government made him a Judge of the Queen's Bench Division. partly because he was friendly with the Lord Chancellor, more because other leading lawyers who deserved to be preferred before him had done nothing for their Party, or else held seats in the House of Commons which their wise old leader feared to risk; and mostly because he had pluckily fought more than one Gladstonian fight, and luckily (for himself) had always suffered defeat.

He has now sat upon the Bench long enough to show that, with all his virtues, he is a failure as a Judge. He began by getting into a muddle over a felony in the country for that a juryman walked out of the jury-box during the trial, he has gone on fussily; and he is now approved the least "strong" of those who administer justice in the High Court. He is very hard-working, very honest, and very courteous in manner, so that he is liked in Court more than he is respected, for the first thing needful in a Judge is to be able to judge. He would be at least an average Judge did he not suffer from so grave an inability to make up his mind that he often finds it very hard to come to any decision at all, yet is he so well liked for himself that fewer hard things are said of him as a Judge than are thought.

He is a very weak Judge with excellent intentions.



THE HON. SIR WILLIAM RANN KENNEDY.

“Our Weakest Judge”

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