## The Lost Will.

A Story of Old Virginia.

REMEMBER an odd story about a will, which, I believe I have never told before. It is not long though it covers a good many years.

One winter evening I was entertaining a few friends at dinner. Some Parisian notoriety was among them, and my housekeeper, lutent on upholding the cuisine of Virginia against all France, outdid herself. The truffle-sauce was as delicate as Fouillet's own, the Perigord-pardon me-but I am fond of good eating. What wise man since Solomon is not?

Just as the Clicquot was beginning to fire the eyes and mellow the laughs about the table, Pine, who had been playing major-domo in the servant's hall, came behind my chair and slipped a note under my plate. "Pierse's Jake fetched it. From his young mistress."

I saw Bob Johns, who was sitting a little way down the table, prick up his ears at this. The clatter of voices and glasses was loud enough for Pine to continue his whisper, unheard, as I furtively glanced at the note. "Jake says the old man's beut on makin' his will, right off. Fur de Lord's sake go, Mars' John. It's de debbil of a night, though." And he slipped off to get overcoat and wrappings.

I ought to go; that was certain; so, with a mournful glance at the jolly faces around the cloth, I pushed old Tom Berkley into my chair, and excused myself for an hour.

When I came down into the hall, a few minutes after, I found Bob Johns ready booted and spurred. I laughed inwardly. "Well, Bob, does old Pierse want to consult you about his will?"

He stammered, and grew red. "1 thought, sir---'

"You thought little Hester might need consolation, so mean to offer your ghostly aid? Well, boys will be boys. Help me on with this shawl here, and get along with you."

We rode off together. A dull, drizzly night, Bob's thoughts of little Hester may have kept him warm, but I found it decidedly uncomfortable, and just like old Pierse to choose such a night for his preparation for the next world. A word of explanation, that you may understand the exigences of the case as well as Bob and I

Some five years before, this same reputable old Pierse had married a widow from Loudon county: a certain Mrs. Wray with one daughter, Hester. The widow was rich, had been an heiress in her girlhood, when, by-the-way, she had known and loved this man Pierse, but had been forced to marry Wray by her father. She never cared for him, nor his daughter; and in less than a year after his death, met and married her old flame Pierse. She was one of these whey-skinned, pale-eyed women, whose loves and hates go down into the grave with them. She did love old Pierse enough to make me doubt her sanity. It was a perpetual miracle to me; but there never was a Bottom yet who could not find a Titania to "stroke his amiable ears." Well, the woman died at last, and then one would have hoped there would be an-end of her lunatic coddling. Far from it. She was a native of Baton Rouge, and her property doubly insured to her by settlement, and the laws of Louisiana, where women have more "rights" than ever Abby Kelly claimed. To justify the title of her sex to an inherent sense of justice, the woman devised her property entire to her husband, leaving Hester utterly dependent on his good will. I don't say old Pierse was a scoundrel. I only quote Shakspeare, and say Titania had been " enamored of an an ass." A pompous, fat animal-perpetual high grand of braggarts-if any seeds of brain or feeling were in the man originally, turtle and brandy had choked them out. Like all braggarts, the man could be led by a child with flattery. Now Hester was no flatterer. A little girl with a low, loving voice, it is true, but a most decisive way of putting down her small foot, and a hearty contempt of all humbug. The two were not colleagues-how could they be? Besides Pierse knew how thoroughly public indignation had been roused on behalf of the girl, and disliked her accordingly; submitted her to numberless vexations-not the least of which was the introduction into the house of a mulatto slave as housekeeper, a woman whom the girl had every reason to fear and shrink from. Some two years back Pierse had made a will, leaving the property to his brother, then in Cuba. I knew of it, and for Hester's sake had brought every influence to bear on the wretch to induce him to alter it, but vainly. In the last year gout had rendered him helpless. Hester had nursed him for the memory of her more genial. dead mother; whatever kindly feeling was buried in the mass of flesh had kindled into life, and day after day I hoped he would do hera late justice. You comprehend now why I hurried to obey his summons? Bob, Johns' interest in the house perhaps you can guess at. Poor little down-trodden Hester was a favorite of mine, and for her sake as well as for his own, I wished Bob would turn into a slower, surer path

through life; but talking, as usual in such

cases, did no good.

steps, her blue eyes swelled with crying; attend to his interests in the matter. thought himself dying, and a few words of by Mr. Brady." Brady bowed haughtily. kindness are enough to melt hearts like "I am also informed that suspicions are Hester's. However, when she saw Bob, her grief abated in a series of intense blushes and shy dimples about her mouth. That gallant young fellow, whom half the girls in Henrico county were in love with, was quite awkward and silent, which made me believe him entirely in earnest, and think all the better of him. I left them in must have my little joke," rubbing his the parlor, and went up to the chamber, where old Pierse was growling and swearing to the confusion of spirit of half a dozen blacks.

Pierse, his growls, or his oaths have nothing to do with my story; so suffice it to say that the will was made, leaving the property, as was just, to Hester, with the exception of some legacies, and was duly witnessed by the doctor and Jones, the overseer. I heard Jones, rough old rowdy as he was, mutter a thank God as he scrawled down his name. I kissed Hester's thin cheek beartily as I came down, and marched Master Bob off with me, The fellow was so lost in rapture or sulkiness that he said nothing the whole way into town. He never once thought of the will, I honestly believe. One thing annoyed me. Pierse kept the will him self, "To have a hold on the girl," he said, and there was no calculating on his moody fits.

He lived four weeks after this. All negrodom was alive with tales of his whims and "debblishness," which Pine occasionally-forgot his high-breeding enough to repeat, when the younger servants were out of hearing, coupled with sympathy for "dat chile lef' to such a 'God-forsaken' wretch." At last one morning, as Jim was shaving me, Pine came in fresh from the morning paper, announcing that, "Bress de Lord, old Pierse was done gone at last." I glanced over the notice of "the lamented death of our highly respected fellowcitizen" while at breakfast, and then drove out to the Pierse plantation. There was a crowd before me; undertakers, negroes and down stairs, Hester's friends (she had true ones of her own, and the heiress of two plantations and eight hundred slaves was likely to have enough), Pierse's first attorney, up in the drawing-rooms, and bustting women everywhere. I sent for uncle

"Is the will safe, uncle?" I asked.

"Tink so, massa," he said, anxiously. "Mars' kep it in dat black box um had under his bed, but um were cranky-beyond belief at de lass. Lord knows what um's done."

I saw something weighed on Joe's mind and beckoned him aside. He drew something mysteriously from his pocket.

"When ole Mars' died, dis key wor in his trousers' pocket. It opens dat curious box-and I tought twas best to make sureef de will's dar, which um good Lord grant!"

The box was curious, as Joe said, a black casket lined with abestos, fastened by a peculiar lock. I remembered the old man had put the will in it, looking at some bank bills it contained with a chuckle, Brady, the lawyer Pierse had formerly employed, joined me in the library, where a funereal lamp burned dismally.

"Rumor says you have a will made lately, Mr. Page," he said. "I'm glad to hear it. A more diabolical piece of injustice than the one I drew up it would be hard to find. The whole property went to his brother. I mention this, sub rosa, of course. Though it matters little, as the deed is null."

I confess Brady and I, however, grew a little impatient for the funeral to be over. Pierse, in the imbecility of his last hours, had gabbled incessantly of the will to the blacks about him, one hour threatening to burn it, the next praying maudlin blessings on Hester's head.

The funeral was over at last, and with Brady and Dr. Folke, who was appointed administrator, I proceeded to search for the will. Hester had been removed to the house of an old Quaker lady the day before. The demure Friend Cox, however, had left "the maiden Hester" asleep, and driven over to see if "justice had been done by that ungodly man." The good old lady checked herself at this unwonted outburst, and smoothed her forehead and lavender silk at the same time, seating herself, placidly in the sunniest corner of the drawingroom. Just as we were beginning our search, a buggy drove up to the door, and Mr. Sholter was announced. Now Sholter was one of the wiryest, willest, lowest pettifoggers in Richmond. Brady drew himself back into his igyest politeness, when this intruder bustled in with outstretched hand: and my own welcome was hardly

"A sad loss ! Sad loss !" he said, summoning a face of woe to cover his embarrassment.

Nobody spoke.

"Have you claims against the personal property, Mr. Sholter?" I asked, seeing that the others waited for me to speak. "Otherwise-our business at present is urgent, and-"

"Pre-cisely," with an ill-concealed smirk. "My business is yours, I am proud to say. I am commissioned by Mr. Samuel Pierse, hear-singing some quaint old scotch song

the old fellow had been kind to her since he will in his favor, I am led to believe, is held entertained that the deceased made a later disposition of his property. Eh! Correct? Well, we'll see to that! Unless the testator altered his mind and burned it. Our departed friend was not a rock in his intentions. Ha! ha! More like St, Reuben than St. Peter; d'ye take, gentlemen? I hands. "Come, let's to business. Most happy to be associated with the first members of the Richmond bar," etc., etc.

> "Never mind !" I laughed to Brady, who was chafing up to his usual exploding point; "we'll have done with him presently!" and so led them to the old man's chamber, going directly to the corner where the box always had stood.

It was not there.

Let me cut my story short. The box was gone; neither chamber nor house held it. There is no need to tire you with our dismay nor rage, nor Sholter's triumph hidden under a condoling face. Well, poor wretch ! no wonder he rejoiced ! The agency falling into his hands was a good, fat living to him. The box was gone.

Uncle Joe said that the olds man had examined the papers it contained two nights before his death, and then hid the casket carefully under the mattrass of the bed; since then he had not seen it. We resolved to keep the loss quiet for a day or two, until a thorough search was made. Meanwhile, Brady, in obedience to the power of attorney held by Sholter, delivered to him and the administrator named therein the former will.

"I will grant you, Mr. Page," said Sholter, condescendingly, "a day's grace to produce the document before I proceed to record the will."

I could have gnashed my teeth at the fellow; but I only bowed and answered, All right. The document will be forthcoming. I do not believe it is burned."

"There I differ with you, sir," he said, with his detestable smirk.

We passed out on the portico. The house servants crowded about me. "Is it all safe, Marster Page ?" said Uncle Joe, acting as spokesman. "Who'd we belong to, marster?" The old negro's voice was Joe, who had been the constant attendant

"You are sanguine, "Mr. Page," speerof the dead man, and was his only mourner, ed Sholter, "If the estate becomes the property of Mr. Pierse, I doubt not these hands will be transferred to the Georgia market."

Uncle Joe's face grew livid. "De good Lord help us!" he muttered, turning away. I watched Sholter bowling down the park, whistling as he went. I suspected almost to certainty that he had been employed by Pierse in Cuba to obtain posses sion of the box by clandestine means. But how to prove it? I turned with Brady and entered the drawing-room, where the old Quaker lady was pacing the floor trying to look calm.

"I hope, friend John, thee brings good tidings?" she said, stopping short.

"We will hope for the best," I said, evasively. She looked keenly at us; then began slowly to pin on her shawl and bonnet. "I must return to Hester," dropping the subject instantly; though I saw her anxious

As I went out to help her into the oldfashioned coach, she leaned forward out of the door, her smooth cheek coloring like a girl's of sixteen. "Friend John, is the young man, 'Robert Johns, betrothed to Hester? I ask not for idle curiosity."

I smiled. "I have suspected such thing to be possible, Friend Cox." She looked more anxious. "You do not like the idea? He is a clever boy-generous, talented." She shook her head.

"A noble young man, as God made him: but as he has made himself-the wine-cup, thee knows?- 'at the last, it stingeth like an adder.' " I was silent. I knew the page in her own story that made her check grow pale now and her gray eyes fill with tears. "I think better of Robert," I said. ." His

worst fault is indolence. Remember the education the sons of our well-blooded, poor families receive. Besides, as the husband of Hester Wray, be will have enough to do to control the plantations."

"When he cannot centrol himself? Oh! friend John, thee had ever a week side for the follies of the young !" And the old lady drove away.

Two days after this late in the evening, I mounted my old hack and rode out to Friend Cox's plantation. Slowly, reluctantly; for I was the bearer of ill tidings. A bright fire burned in the library, flashing jets of light on the gray silken curtains, the plain rich furniture and books, the group of faces gathered about it. The mild eyes of the old Quaker were the only ones that had any tinge of sadness. Bob Johns' face, with the brown hair pushed back, fairly lit up the room with its hearty giee. Why should it not? Life had always been pleasant-opened brighter and warmer now. No day had thwarted him of all these years gone. And Bob's heart and brain were steeped in the most crimson flush of love just then, sitting on a low foot-stool at Hester's feet. She had been singing-she had low, chirping voice, very pleasant to

The girl came out to meet me on the brother of the deceased, now in Cuba, to about the "Land o' the leal." Melancholy enough ! yet its sadness deepened the joy somehow for the two young hearts. touched the old one, too, if I mistake not, not witstanding the "testimony" of her sect against music; for the face was flushed coming to meet me. A quiet, happy breath pervaded the room. I settled down in it among them, uncertain how to break my news. Concluded next week.

#### SUNDAY READING.

What Does it Mean !

"Father, what does it mean to be a drunkard? Maggie Gray said that you was a drunkard, and her father said so.

Had a bomb shell exploded at the feet of Mr. Wetson he could not have been more surprised. He stood mute, and one might have heard a pin drop, so silent were they

But Katie, nothing daunted, after waiting what she thought a proper length of time repeated the question; and it was answered.

"A man who drinks liquor and makes a

beast of himself." "Is that what you do, father?"

"It's what I have done some times," re plied the man in a choked voice,

"It's bad, am't it?" "Yes, child; the very worst thing a man can do."

"And that's what makes mother cry when there don't anything hurt her; and that's the reason I have to wear such dreadful old shoes ?"

Only one word in reply to this-"Yes."

"Then I shouldn't think you'd do so don't like to wear old shoes a bit. You o o o o won't be a drunkard any more, will you?" said Kate as she looked up to her father so 0 0 0 0 confidently that he caught her in his arms and hid his face upon her shoulders.

"Say, father, you won't will you?"

"No, darling, I won't." And raising his hand he promised never, never to drink another drop of intexicating liquor. "God help me," he added reverently. "Bless o o o o you, my darling you have saved me."

Then there were tears and sobs, and broken ejaculations, all for very joy, while supper was forgotten. It made no difference to Kaity whether her shoes were old or new, but when a few days after she became the possessor of some long boots with red lacings and tassels, she had a better appreciation of the change that had taken place.

### Mr. Beecher on Dying.

Rev. Mr. Beecher does not think it an evidence of special Christian grace to be willing to die. Nor does he think it natural for the young and those full of these activities of life to desire to die. He says it is better to be willing to live and do the duties of life. When Paul said it was better to depart he was an old man and in prison. If an October pippin is ready to drop, is that any reason a little green apple in June should be ready? All the representations of the New Testament about death are full of cheer and hope. For Paul to die was to go to Christ. Dving is not growing short of breath and feeble of pulse; it is flying up to the Al-loving Soul of the universe. It is going to sweet companionship. We struggle on through the world, finding little companionship, but we go to the spirit of just men made perfect. We go to where all the conditions lift us up to a realm of nobility. There all is in concord. There is no selfishness, no hardness, and cradeness, and revenge; all are working up with one sweet impulse with the great, genial, creative force of Divine love. These thoughts ring in my soul like the bell of a far off city drawing me thitherward. Dying is the easiest thing men do. The suffering is in life; but as a rule, men die as easily as a door turns upon its hinges. Dying is going home; not to supinenes, not to Oriental glory, but to supreme activity, where every part is developed and cultured in the realm of love.

### The Silver Lining.

Rain is not always comfortable while it is falling; but when it ceases, and the clouds' clear away from the sky, everything thrills and dances with delight. The dew is chilling to earthly pursuits, and while it is falling darkness is upon the world; but when the bright beams of daylight come, and the rising sun flashes on the hills, and its golden rays illuminate the valleys, it would seem as if an angel had oversown the fields with diamonds, and hung a brilliant on every blade and leaf. The very air is redolent of heavenly fragrance, and, the whole earth is breathless amid the sougs and as there may be discomfort and darkness, clouds and gloom, while the word of the Lord is finding the way into our souls; but those clouds will soon clear away, and that night be over. And when the sunlight comes, and the day renews itself, and heavenly morning dawns, there shall come visions of beauty and experience of good, beyond all present imaginings, and over which the universe will thrill with rejoicings at what the word of the Lord, honestly received into the soul, has wrought .- f Dr.

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