

The Lost Will.

A Story of Old Virginia.

REMEMBER an odd story about a will, which, I believe I have never told before.

One winter evening I was entertaining a few friends at dinner. Some Parisian notoriety was among them, and my house-keeper, intent on upholding the cuisine of Virginia against all France, outdid herself.

Just as the Cliequot 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.

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.

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.

He stammered, and grew red. "I 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 Pierce to choose such a night for his preparation for the next world.

Some five years before, this same reputable old Pierce had married a widow from London 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 Pierce, but had been forced to marry Wray by her father.

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 sure—ef 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.

"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.

I confess Brady and I, however, grew a little impatient for the funeral to be over. Pierce, 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.

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

"Have you claims against the personal property, Mr. Sholter?" I asked, seeing that the others waited for me to speak.

"Pre-cisely," with an ill-concealed smirk.

"My business is yours, I am proud to say. I am commissioned by Mr. Samuel Pierce,

The girl came out to meet me on the steps, her blue eyes swelled with crying; the old fellow had been kind to her since he thought himself dying, and a few words of kindness are enough to melt hearts like Hester's.

Pierce, 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.

He lived four weeks after this. All negro-dom was alive with tales of his whims and "debbliness," 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."

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."

"I will grant you, Mr. Page," said Sholter, coudescenting, "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.

"You are sanguine," Mr. Page, sneered Sholter. "If the estate becomes the property of Mr. Pierce, I doubt not these hands will be transferred to the Georgia market."

"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, busily, she slowly to pin on her shawl and bonnet.

"I must return to Hester," dropping the subject instantly; though I saw her anxious eyes.

"I have suspected such a 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 cheek 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, he will have enough to do to control the plantations."

"When he cannot control 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.

"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 hear—singing some quaint old scotch song

brother of the deceased, now in Cuba, to attend to his interests in the matter. A will in his favor, I am led to believe, is held by Mr. Brady." Brady bowed haughtily.

"Never mind!" I laughed to Brady, who was chafing up to his usual exploding point; "we'll have done with him presently!"

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.

Uncle Joe said that the old man had examined the papers it contained two nights before his death, and then hid the casket carefully under the mattress of the bed; since then he had not seen it.

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about the "Land o' the leal." Melancholy enough! yet its sadness deepened the joy, somehow for the two young hearts. It touched the old one, too, if I mistake not, not withstanding 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. Watson he could not have been more surprised. He stood mute, and one might have heard a pin drop, so silent were they all.

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 hese done some times," replied the man in a choked voice.

"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 any more, 'cause mother's good," and I don't like to wear old shoes a bit. You won't be a drunkard any more, will you?" said Kate as she looked up to her father so 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 intoxicating liquor. "God help me," he added reverently. "Bless 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 Katie 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.

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.

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.

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W. H. DILL, A. M. Principal.

or WILLIAM GRIER, Principal.

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