

A DYING PROMISE

OR, THE MISSING
WILL

CHAPTER III.

So the child's will prevailed, Philip knew nothing of the controversy between the Medways and the Meades as to which house he should belong. Sir Arthur had weakly consented to refer the question to the boy, without dreaming that a lad of that age would hesitate for a moment in preferring such a home as he had to offer to the gray solitude of Stillbrooke Mill.

"Very good, sir," was Meade's last words. "If you takes the boy, I goes to law."

This clinched the matter; the Medways dreaded the publicity of a legal process beyond everything. As Matthew had represented, Philip was practically at Sir Arthur's gates, he could watch him and make sure of his welfare. His adoptive father pledged himself to give him the best education to be had in Clevee and start him afterward in a profession when he failed in those conditions, Sir Arthur could step in. So the visit to Marwell Court soon faded to a dim golden memory in Philip's mind; he forgot Claude and Hugh's description of their schools and sports, and the glowing picture of the Eton lie now to be Claude's and the lad's congenial companionship. Everything connected with them slept out of sight in his mind while the quiet years slipped by like a peaceful dream, and Philip grew a tall, lanky lad, a sore puzzle to the miller now that the time was come for choosing a profession.

As usual the wishes of youth did not chime with the counsels of ripeness. The navy alone had charms for Philip; the church for his parents. A vision of the boy's merry face rising above gown and white bands, in the oaken pulpit of Clevee Church, haunted Mrs. Meade's mind with beatific persistence, while Mr. Meade felt it would be a grand thing to hear Philip read the burial service over him and perhaps preach his funeral sermon.

Philip's only alternative proposition was the army. The question was seriously debated at a Christmas-gathering at Stillbrooke Mill by a small knot of elders grouped, church-warden in hand, round the fire in the common parlor while the young people played games in the best parlour.

"You may depend upon it, Meade," observed Cousin Jane, an uninvited presence in the smoking parlour, "you'll hev to pay for bringing the boy up above plain folk."

"I've paid already, ma'am, for this year," replied Meade, "and got schoolmaster's receipt upon the file." Cousin Jane's husband's mouth went upwards at this observation.

"You've a right to mock at your wife's relations at your own fireside Mr. Meade," she returned mournfully, "but mocking won't undo the wrong you done my poor sister's child for the sake of a foundling and a castaway. But it's none of my business. You may make the boy prime minister to-morrow for all I should meddle. And let Jessie go barefoot. Not that she'll ever come to good, spoiled and muddled up as she is."

"Make a land agent of him, Meade," interposed Mr. Plummer, Cousin Jane's husband, with some haste. "Sir Arthur's agent's fine gentleman enough for anybody, so's his wife."

"A lawyer," observed Mr. Cheeseman, the corn-dealer and town councillor, "is a gentleman by act of parliament. I'll warrant law's a ne business. It takes brains and makes money."

"Lawyers," added Mr. Symes, the lockmaker, "have a finger in everybody's pie. Mr. Westley has half the town under his thumb."

"You may say what you like," added Mr. Plummer, "whatever business a lawyer's in, the money sticks to en. Whether it's drawing of a case, or raising of a mortgage; the overcains cleave to his fingers. Give a lawyer money to lay out and he'll be a lucky man if you lives to see the half of it agen. Whoever has a lawyer's never broke. There's oney in law, Meade."

"Aye, but think of the rascality, ummer," sighed Mr. Meade. "To be sure," was the chourussed reply, "whoever heard of a honest lawyer?"

"Millers haven't always been recked straight men," observed a therto silent smoker, Mr. Reade, ocer and church-warden. What's at about the miller's thumb, Meade, eh?"

"Mr. Reade must hav his joke," mmented Martha, coming forward to see if people's glasses were properly filled, amid a chorus of chuck over the jest.

"I've heard say 't is a fine thing be a barrister," Mr. Meade conued, "but meself, I can't see it, for ever they earn so much as a ny piece they've got to eat dings for a year or two in a sort of ch. And when they get a job's mostly a dirty one so far as I make out. A barrister that's a scoundrel off hanging is a de man, they tell me, and run or by every villain in the land."

Philip can eat dinners at home, and the fewer scoundrels get let off the better. Doctoring I've laid awake over many a night. But I shouldn't like the boy to live off other folk's ills. As for a clergyman, he won't so much as look at it."

"It does seem hard work to be a honest man and a gentleman to be sure," commented Mrs. Meade. "Many a time I've said to Meade, 'let the child be plain and honest.'"

"You may warrant," added her husband, "gentle or simple, 'tis a heavy thing to be honest and rich, whatever trade you take."

A chorus of denials followed, for nearly all present were men of substance and each convinced of his own integrity, though doubtful of that of others.

The end of this and many such conferences was that Philip found himself one fine morning perched upon a high stool in Mr. Westley's office, an articulated clerk. He came home at night, pale and silent; at the end of a month, a doctor had to be consulted. The doctor recommended air and exercise; which being taken speedily restored the patient. Six weeks more in the office reduced Philip to the same low level. His release came; Mr. Meade's purse was lightened, and there was Philip free, and a standing problem once more.

A period of idling followed, then Philip, having neatly set his dog's broken leg in splints, suddenly took it into his head to be a doctor, remembering that a doctor can enter either army or navy. Therefore one memorable night in the memorable year of the Crimean war, found Philip making pills in Dr. Maule's surgery, with a listless air and dispirited face.

He had been apprenticed for more than a year and a half, and felt himself little wiser than he had been at the beginning. As for old Maule, as he called him, he soon found out that all his skill was built upon experience and that he was as incapable as he was unwilling to teach him.

Many a headache did the poor lad get over Dr. Maule's medical books, his bones, and his instruments; the names of diffeent bones and muscles refused to remain in his head, the books were a hopeless maze without a clue, he began to think that he had no aptitude for the profession, and to crown all he had to be interrupted so perpetually in receiving patients, taking their messages and mixing their medicines that no sooner had he succeeded in making himself acquainted with the carotid artery or the thyroid cartilage than a report upon old Mr. Robinson's gout drove both cartilage and artery out of his mind.

"Teach!" the old doctor would say with a hearty oath, "how the devil am I to find time to cram your thick head? Nobody ever taught me; I picked up what I could in old Pestle's surgery, with the assistant and the other apprentice swearing at me and boxing my ears from morning till night, but damn me I took care to pull through the examinations. I wasn't cockered like you. Learn, you lazy dog, learn!"

He was a kind old fellow, with a sort of bluff cordiality, and did not swear with his patients more than enough to give his discourse a pungent emphasis; he took care not to be the worse but rather the better for his powerful potations when on duty, he was shrewd too and knew men, thus he was popular, and when his patients died people said it was the will of God, and when they recovered (as they sometimes did) the skill of Dr. Maule.

Suddenly, while Philip was musing over his pills, the surgery door opened violently and in stormed the old doctor, pouring out a broadside of oaths. Philip knew that he had been dining out and had not expected him to return for another hour or two. Having consigned Philip piecemeal to perdition in company with his own soul, he suddenly thrust a bottle into his face and asked him what he meant by that.

"Mean, sir?" returned Philip, "I suppose I meant it for cough mixture."

Alas! it was a poisonous compound intended for outward use and clearly marked for inward in Philip's handwriting.

"You murderous young dog!" shouted the doctor. "I'm not a dog," retorted Philip. "I have not made a beast of myself," he added with sarcasm.

"What do you mean?" cried the doctor with a thick utterance.

"I mean," cried Philip, suddenly and passionately, "that I came here to study medicine, and not to be bullied and sworn at and made to do all your work."

"Take that," roared the doctor, with embellishments, boxing his ears, whereupon Philip seized him by the collar and laid him flat on the floor, in which position Dr. Maule's grown-up son entering, discovered them.

"This is nice manly behavior, Randal," said young Maule, picking up his irate parent and placing him in a chair; and after much blustering

on the old man's part, and vain attempts at peace-making on the son's, Philip found himself in the street, with the information that his indentures would have to be cancelled and he need not return.

So ended Philip's second career. "What's the good of a fellow like me?" he thought, marching defiantly down the street and whistling savagely.

He finished the evening with some fellows of his own age, not a very steady set, and tried with loud merriment, jovial songs and deep potations, to bury his chagrin.

It was late when he bent his wavering steps homeward, wondering why in the world the houses kept knocking up against him, and who was that villain continually pushing him off the pavement. To solve these problems, he leant against a lamp-post, mournfully wailing:

"Why did my master sell me

Upon my wedding day?"

Just at this moment who should come around the corner but his bete noire, the vicar, returning from Mrs. Carlyon's dinner party.

"Come, Randal," said Mr. Bryan, roughly. "What are you doing here? You are drunk. Get home directly."

"Get home 'self," retorted Philip, thickly; "s'graceful time of night for parson."

Waxy Bryan, as the street-boys called their hot-tempered Irish pastor, instead of leaving the luckless boy to grow sober before going home, angrily pushed him away from the lamp-post. Philip, to save himself, caught at him, the streets were slippery with rain, and after a brief struggle the two fell full length in each other's arms on the pavement, just as a policeman sauntered around the corner.

Mr. Bryan was soon on his feet and promptly gave Philip into custody for knocking him down, and the unhappy boy finished the night at the police station.

What a waking was his next morning! Racking headache, sickness, bodily depression, and heavy shame.

The brawl had not been without witnesses, and when Mr. Bryan woke in the morning with a cool head and remembered that he had in sober truth committed the assault, vindictive as he was, he considered it better not to prosecute Philip. He therefore repaired to the station early and withdrew his charge.

Philip, haggard and dishevelled, with the disreputable air that always clings to people who have passed the night in their clothes, took refuge in a small public-house, feeling that he could not go home yet, and sat down to write home. His dizzy throbbing head weighed upon his hands as he sat with elbows on the table and tried to find words fit for his narrative. An hour went by and he had not got beyond "dear father," he heard loungers at the bar discussing "this here Rooshian job;" the smart, quick music of fife and drum called all to doors, and windows, and street corners. Even Philip raised his heavy head and looked up to see a recruiting-party with streaming ribbons step briskly past to the tune of "Come cheer up my lads, 'tis to glory we steer!"

The whole thing was inspiring to one so downcast as Philip, and offered a sudden solution of his life's problem; war was coming, men were wanted, volunteers were offering, promotion would be quick. In a short time, Philip was the richer by a silver shilling in his pocket and the smarter for a bunch of ribbons in his hat.

In the meantime there had been sorrow at the mill, and Mr. Meade had hurried early in the morning to Dr. Maule's to see if he could throw any light upon the boy's disappearance.

Dr. Maule was sober and melancholy at this hour of the day. Though a hard drinker he was seldom as overcome as on the preceding night; he greatly regretted the affair with Philip in the surgery, which he related to Mr. Meade with impartial accuracy.

"He won't do for physic, Meade," he said; "he's lazy and won't bear the curb. Put him to hard outdoor work."

But the doctor could not tell where the boy was, and Mr. Meade returned disconsolately homeward, one his way meeting Mr. Bryan, whose account of the preceding night's adventure was acrid and disquieting.

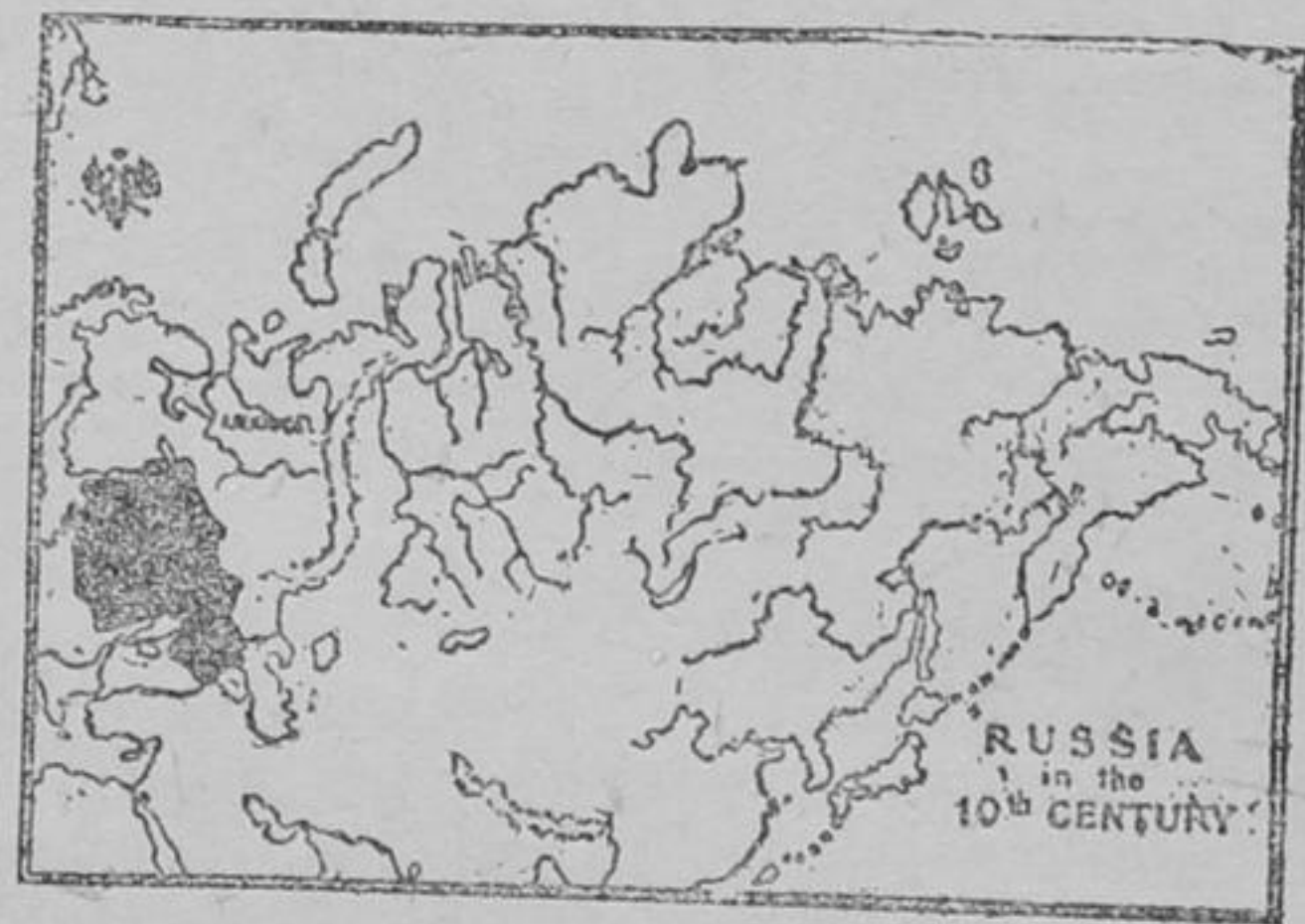
"I always said that boy would come to no good," the vicar added, consolingly, "he is one of the wildest young fellows in the parish. You give him too much liberty, Mr. Meade."

"As well hang a dog at once as give him a bad name," cried the miller, indignantly, "you was always hard on my poor boy, sir. I'd sooner be a poor black heathen than your sort of Christian."

Then he met Mr. Ingleby, the curate, a good-hearted young fellow, who had often done the lad a kind turn, and to whom Philip had just gone with his confession, desiring him to communicate all to his father.

It was a heavy blow to Matthew and Martha, whose first thought was to buy Philip out at once; but Matthew Meade was not a man to do anything in a hurry. He considered the subject well first, and finally Mr. Ingleby's advice, coupled with Philip's own earnest supplications and urgent reasonings, together with Dr. Maule's report upon the lad's capacities, induced Mr. Meade to yield a reluctant consent to his prodigal's remaining in the ranks. Mr. Ingleby had taken an interest in the boy for years, and his verdict was

Maps Illustrating Nine Centuries of Russian Expansion



The space enclosing a number in each map represents the area of Russia in the former one.

that he suffered from being educated above his surroundings, and would infinitely profit from the discipline in the ranks. He also undertook to interest his brother, a captain in the same regiment, in the new recruit.

So it came to pass shortly after that Philip looking, as little Jessie thought, very smart and handsome in his infantry uniform, and feeling very gay and hopeful, marched with his regiment on board a troop-ship bound for the East, amid the thunder of a vast crowd's cheers, the weeping of women and children, and a thousand piteous little farewell scenes.

Matthew Meade, with Martha and Jessie, now a pretty playful girl of twelve, with deep blue eyes and hair of waven beams, stood amid the crowd to watch the embarkation and wave Philip a last farewell, with deeply moved hearts.

It was indeed a moving scene, calling a complexity of the deepest feelings into play, one which few Englishmen could witness without strong thrills of patriotic pride and fear and hope, and few human beings without the stirring of tenderest sympathies. The great ships lay like giants at rest on the blue waters, the beautiful winged wooden warships looking like living creatures, and the great troop-ships; the shore was lined and covered at every coign of vantage with human beings, all moved by one vast common interest, all more or less sorrowful, for as regiment after regiment marched by with firm, even step the spectators could not but remember the certainty that

many of those fine men would return again no more. On that late winter day the justice or injustice of the impending but as yet undeclared war with Russia was forgotten; for as cheer after cheer thundered along the shore and echoed back from wall, bastion, and church tower, and was taken up and repeated from ship to ship and from rank to rank of that moving mass of armed men and broken by the gay defiance of the martial music, those present could only remember that they were Englishmen, animated by one hope, stimulated to one common duty, citizens of a great nation with centuries of honor and achievement behind her and the dim splendor of a great future before her, and that the honor of England would perhaps soon be at stake.

And so the war passion took them; for the English are, as every truly great nation must be, a martial people; they do not rush into war with a light heart, or, knowingly, for an unjust cause; the waste, the agony, the pity of it appals them; for they are too brave not to be humane; but once convinced that it is their duty to fight, they fight heroically, silently, patiently, with an unquestioning discipline unknown to other nations.

(To be Continued.)

"Mamma, the right way to spell 'high' is h-i-g-h, isn't it?" "Yes, dear. Why do you wish to know?" "Cause I'm writin' a composition about the highness."