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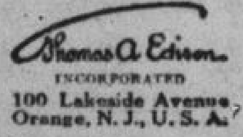

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ECCENTRIC BEQUESTS

THE VAGARIES OF THOSE POSSESSING MONEY ARE STRANGE.

Employes Who Have Left Sums of Money to Their Employers In Sarcasm or to Relieve Conditions of Fellow Workers—Mean Husbands Who Have Put Hard Conditions on Their Wives.

The home of strange wills is in the old country, although Canada, young as it is, there have been some bequests made which have caused our worthy inhabitants to wonder at the vagaries of the old and even of the comparatively young. For instance take the case still recent in the minds of Montrealers in which an erstwhile inhabitant of the city, at the time of his death desiring to remember in a public manner, the city in which he claimed to have received his first start in life, bequeathed to the Corporation of Montreal a considerable sum of money to be devoted to the relief of the poor. Here are a few English incidents which illustrate curious wills much better.

Judging by the frequent examples of strange wills that every now and again come to light, there seems to be a strong tendency among a large class of testators to make their "last wills and testaments" as eccentric and peculiar as possible.

Not so long ago, for instance, an eccentric Manchester gentleman died who held strong views as to the undesirability of marriage between cousins. Dying childless, he left a large fortune the interest of which was to be divided equally between his nephew and neice, the only children of two elder sisters. Attached to this legacy was a strange proviso that did the young people marry one another, the money should revert to a well-known Lancashire charity. The nephew lived in Blackburn, the neice in Bristol. They had never met, and, under ordinary circumstances, probably never would have done so. Curiosity led the nephew to spend a holiday in Bristol, and there to visit his cousin, the girl whom he was so strangely forbidden to wed. It was a case of love at first sight. In a fortnight the cousins were engaged, and before the year was out there were wedding bells, which caused the trustees of the Lancashire charity to rejoice.

Some of the most amusing wills are those that are inspired by feelings of spite against a testator's kith or kin. The late Mr. Sydney Dickenson takes high rank among testator humorists of this type. He bequeathed $300,000 to his widow on these grimly ironical conditions: "When I remember that the only happy times I have enjoyed have been when my wife sulked with me, and when I remember that as she was nearly always sulking my life with her has been fairly happy, I am tempted to forget the repulsion the sight of her face inspired me with, and leave her the sum of $300,000 on condition that she spends two hours a day at my graveside for ten years in company with my sister, whom I know she loathes more than she does myself."

It was a similar sense of gratitude which inspired Mr. William Darley, of Ash, in Hertfordshire, to leave his wife a shilling, "in admiration of the skill with which she was in the habit of robbing me of all small sums she could lay her hands on."

A mariner of Bristol, who had evidently been blessed with a spouse none too conspicuous for her domestic traits, instructed his executors: "To pay out of the first moneys collected to my beloved wife, if living, one shilling, that she may buy hazel nuts as I know she is better pleased with cracking them than she is with mending the holes in her stockings."

A testator's employer sometimes becomes his legatee but when this is the case the bequest is usually made with some ulterior motive. A Welshman who left the handsome sum of one shilling to his master did so in order that the latter might purchase a "book on manners," as he sadly lacked the merest semblance of the same when dealing with his subordinates. A case not dissimilar to this was that of the lawyer who died of overwork, and who bequeathed $100 to the solicitors who had employed him, conditionally on the sum being devoted to the paying of overtime fees to such of the clerks as were compelled to work after ordinary office hours. In both cases there was more a desire for better conditions of labor than a wish to benefit the employers.

Some executors are called upon to carry out the most peculiar instructions. Thus, a prosperous merchant, who lived and died in the Midlands, desired that his funeral should take place a week after his death, an hour before dawn, and with the strictest economy. At the same time he expressed a wish that eighteen of his bosom friends, whom he mentioned by name, should be present at his interment, and that in return for their services each should be paid ten pounds out of his estate. No signs of mourning were to be allowed, and every acquaintance of his who attended the burial was to be presented with a pair of white kid gloves, and afterwards with a bottle of wine, that they might drink to the health of his soul, "then," as he expressed it, "on its journey to purification before the eternal rest."

It is questionable if any will ever survived a more adventurous ordeal than the one which was made by a laborer who died in New Zealand in 1868. He left all he had—some $1,500 in the British Postoffice—to his wife, who lived at Rye, in Sussex. The will was rather an elaborate affair, engrossed at prodigious length on parchment, and adorned with the seal of the Supreme Court of New Zealand in the bottom left hand corner.

The will after being wrecked off the Scilly Islands was picked up on the beach by some Cornish fishermen and sent on to London.

Mustn't Bark.

Eastbourne, England, has recently approved a bylaw forbidding dogs to bark on the sea front.

People are actually what they seem—after they die.

If some wives would only shut up when their husbands tell them to a lot of divorce judges would have to hunt other jobs.

ANCIENT CUSTOMS.

Quaint Usages and Superstitions Connected With Stockings.

Stockings figure in some curious superstitions touching old customs, especially those connected with marriage. Every one knows that there are actions both lucky and unlucky. Among the former, it is commonly held that to put on any article of clothing wrongside out is decidedly a sign of good luck; but it must be done accidentally, and when the mistake is found out no change must be made, else the luck will immediately vanish. This idea is very firmly held about stockings, probably because it is more easy to make such a mistake in putting than in donning other garments.

Another superstition touching the use of hose is connected with dreaming. This is a Scotch notion. If a person be about to sleep in a bed that he or she has never slept in before, the certainty of dreaming can be assured by placing the stocking taken off the right foot under the head. Not only will the sleeper be sure to dream, but the dream will certainly come to pass.

Of the superstitions attached to marriage ceremonies, most people have heard of "throwing the stocking." This rite would hardly be regarded now as consistent with modern notions of decorum, but it was highly popular in days gone by. The ceremony was performed at the conclusion of the wedding-day's festivities, by young men and girls seated at the bed-foot—the former have the bride's and the latter the groom's stockings—whose object in throwing the hose backwards over their heads was to hit, if possible, the head, and especially the nose, of one or other of the newly-married couple. A successful shot meant marriage at an early date for the thrower.

A pleasant association connected with stockings is familiar to all households at Christmas time. Children still hang up their stockings at Christmas Eve in the simple faith that Santa Claus will fill them during that night of wonder; or, if the little people are too sophisticated to believe in the stories of St. Nick's peregrinations, they still retain a firm faith in the goodness of his domestic representatives, and duly hang up their stockings as their predecessors have done for generations. And not children alone hung up their hose of old. Grown-ups, as well as the small folk, used to observe this custom most conscientiously. But in the old days the hanging up of the stocking took place not on Christmas Eve, but more appropriately on the eve of St. Nicholas' Day, which falls on the fifth of December.

Another old custom, which the superstitious sometimes remember when they get married, is to wear one old stocking and one new one following the thought, perhaps, that every bride should wear "something old; something new." To this day many brides adhere to this old habit, or superstition, but they do not confine the apparel to stockings.

Peers' Confusing Titles.

Reference is made in the new issue of "Debrett's Peerage" to the multiplication of the titles of peers with the same or a similar sounding designation.

This year the title of Mr. Gair Ashton gives us Lord Ashton, Lord Ashtown, and Lord Ashton of Hyde, while Lord Brassey's heir is now Lord Hythe, and we also have Lord Hardinge and his brother—the Viceroy of India, Lord Hardinge of Penshurst.

Then there are Lord Strafford and Lord Stafford, while there is another which "Debrett" does not mention—Lord Stafford, the son of the Duke of Sutherland. Lord Arundel (the Duke of Norfolk's heir) has to be distinguished from Lord Arundell of Wardour, and Lord Clifford of Chudleigh from Lord de Clifford.

Confusion, too, sometimes arises between Lord Curzon of Kedleston and Lord Curzon (Lord Howe's heir); indeed a "correction" appeared in a paper a little while ago that there was no Lady Curzon, as Lord Curzon of Kedleston was a widower!

Indifferent handwriting sometimes leads to Lord Home appearing as Lord Howe, and to the mixing up of Lord Manners and Lord Manvers, while great care has to be taken to distinguish between Lord Hampton and Lord Hampden, Lord Lindsay and Lord Lindsey, Lord Longford and Lord Langford, and Lord Middleton and Lord Midleton.

Too Much For Censor.

The battle against the dramatic censorship continues in England with vigor. Denunciations of the tyranny exercised over the production of new plays by the Lord Chamberlain's department are of daily occurrence. But it is open to doubt if the publication in book form of Zangwill's censored play, "The Next Religion," helped the cause of freedom, as the passages the author was asked to delete are, in the opinion of a good many people, sufficiently offensive to warrant the Lord Chamberlain's action.

The play is a scathing indictment of orthodox Christianity. The passages to which official objection was taken are not very startling, however, to the impartial observer. In one place the Creator is spoken of as "The God who will send tuberculosis even through the Communion chalice," and in another place Westminster Abbey is called "that shrine of superstition."

On the Jump.

One of Lord Charles Beresford's tenants who conducted a small undertaker's establishment in Waterford was one day asked how the business was getting along.

"Grand, me lord!" he exclaimed. "I now have the luckiest little hearse you ever saw. Glory be to goodness, it was never a day idle since I got it."—Tit-Bits.

Sarcastic.

Buggins—See here, porter, this mirror is so dusty I can't see myself in it. Porter (who has been tipped by Buggins)—Strikes me you ought to be mighty thankful, 'stid o' makin' a fuss about it.—Tit-Bits.

The man who is his own worst enemy always attempts to shift the blame.

A chicken hearted man should never marry unless he is anxious to break into the henpecked class.

STOCK STORIES.

The Same Anecdotes Do For Various Distinguished Personages.

When that distinguished but eccentric politician and journalist, Mr. Labouchere, died, the newspapers were flooded with stories about him. A well-informed friend of his rather spoiled their effect by declaring that most of them had been invented on the Stock Exchange, or were second-hand.

As a matter of fact, there are not nearly enough good stories to go round. When a new figure become prominent an economical press usually fathers on him anecdotes that have done good services years ago about other people.

There is really a sort of stage army of stories. Each one gets a few years' rest now and again, but good anecdotes are so few that they are seldom permitted to go into permanent retirement. A few modernizing touches, and they are as good as new, fitting the new father as well as they did the old. The new father may smile, but so long as the supposed offspring of his brain is a credit to him he seldom objects.

Lately, for instance, a story has appeared here and there in print about Pavlova, the famous dancer. A millionaire's wife is said to have asked her to dance at a party, Pavlova said she would, and mentioned casually that her terms were $1,500.

"Isn't that rather high for a dancer?" the lady asked haughtily. "Couldn't you make it $1,200?"

Pavlova shook her head.

"I could not possibly dance for less."

"Very well," was the resigned answer, "you shall have $1,500." At the door she turned. "You know, of course, that I shan't expect you to mix with my guests?"

"Oh, in that case," answered the famous dancer, with her sweetest smile, "I shall be glad to let you off the extra $300. I was afraid you would."

But a couple of years ago exactly the same story was being told of Madame Tetrazzini. Before that the scene was laid in London; dollars were pounds, and the heroine was Melba. It was probably a Patti story, too, in its time.

A few weeks ago a friend of Lord Alverstone's, the Lord Chief Justice, remarked playfully that no human being could possibly be so wise as Lord Alverstone looked. For years this little joke will probably be tacked on to Lord Alverstone. But just over a century ago the famous wit and statesman, Fox, said exactly the same thing of a then judge, Lord Thurlow.

Mr. Balfour is the pink of old-world politeness. So naturally he is fathered with the story that when a lady at a party reproached him with having passed her without looking at her, he replied courteously, "Madam, if I had seen you I could not possibly have passed you!"

Good! But of at least six others wits the same story has been told—Talleyrand, Col. Sanderson, Sir Herbert Tree, Sir Henry Irving, Sydney Smith, and Lewis Carroll.

Did a distinguished critic really say of Sir Herbert Tree's rendering of Hamlet that it was funny without being vulgar? One sees occasional references to the incident in the newspapers. But every new Hamlet runs the risk of having this damaging compliment hurled at him. The remark is exactly that which Kemble made, of his bitter rival Kean's playing of the part.

A House That Can Fly.

A flying machine which can be rapidly converted into a neat little two-story cottage has been invented by Mr. H. G. Turner of Eldon Grove, Manchester, England.

The inventor asserts that this new departure in aviation will make the flying man independent of hotel accommodation, and enable him to guard his machine at night by sleeping, as it were, on the premises.

The aviator of the future, it is understood, will sweep a hawk-like glance over the landscape for a healthy gravel site, direct his volplane so as to alight with a south view, and then, by an adjustment of the planes, convert the aeroplane into a neat little homestead. In the morning he will peer out to see if the weather holds good, and then make a quick change from hearth and home to planes and petrol.

Mr. Turner describes his machines as a tri-monoplane, and says that one or two minutes will suffice to convert the planes into a two-story structure, with a couple of cabins for sleeping and cooking. Oil stoves and bedding can be carried on the machine.

Her Pious Wish.

Robert Burns' friend, Dr. Blacklock, the blind poet, was a licentiate of the church of Scotland and used to preach occasionally.

One Sunday he was supplying a country pulpit. Certain deaf old women, as was the custom in those days, had squatted on the pulpit stairs to be as near the preacher as possible. Like the mass of the Scottish people, they abominated sermons that were read.

One of them as soon as the discourse was begun said to her neighbor in a tone that was audible through the whole church, "Is he readin'?"

"Tuts, woman! No, he canna read. He's blind."

"Blind, is he, eh? That's real fortnate. I wish they were a' blind."

Navy Not Popular.

Alarmed at the number of foreigners serving on ships sailing from the port of London, and the decrease in British seafarers, the London County Council, the education authority for the metropolis, is seeking to find a remedy.

Forty years ago one man in 28 born in England was in the mercantile marine. To-day the proportion is not more than half that, while the number of Lascars and other Asiatics has more than doubled.

A report has now been presented to the London County Council recommending a training ship for the production of officers, in which a two years' course will be given to boys from 15 years of age.

The earth was a revolver before firearms were invented.

If a man is convinced against his will he isn't.

A woman's look affects a man more than her talk.

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