

WILL-MAKING ECCENTRICITIES.

Wills have been made of every conceivable shape and form. We find them consisting of only a few words, like that of Mr. Kenneth Macaulay, dated April, 1865, which merely said: "One thousand pounds to my brother Tom; all the residue to my dearest wife absolutely;" and we have seen them in the shape of portentous-looking documents, containing a score or more of folios. Among the number are numerous interesting specimens of original composition, both prose and verse. Many examples of poetical wills, written in rather rough doggerel, are extant, one of the most amusing being that of a Mr. Joshua West, and dated December 13, 1804:

Perhaps I die not worth a groat,
But should I die worth something more,
Then I give that and my old coat,
And all my manuscripts in store,
To those who shall the goodness have
To cause my poor remains to rest
Within a decent shell and grave.
This is the will of JOSHUA WEST.

Another specimen of this kind is the production of one William Jackitt, of the parish of St. Mary, Islington, and for thirty years a clerk in the firm of Messrs. Fuller & Vaughan, once of Cornhill. It was proved at Doctors' Commons on the 17th July, 1789:

I give and bequeath,
When I'm laid underneath,
To my two loving sisters, most dear,
The whole of my store,
Were it twice as much more,
Which God's goodness has granted me here.
And that none may prevent
This my will and intent,
Or occasion the least of law racket,
With a solemn appeal
I confirm, sign, and seal,
This, the true act and deed of WILL JACKITT.

Very frequently the most extraordinary provisos and conditions are attached to the wills of certain eccentric individuals. Thus, at Montgaillard, in 1822, a man died who by his friends and relations has been called the "misanthrope." In his will he left directions that any of his relations who should shed tears at his funeral should be disinherited; but that he who laughed the most heartily should be sole heir. He also ordered that neither the church, nor his house should be hung with black cloth, but that on the day of his burial those places should be decorated with flowers and evergreens. In addition to this, all the musicians of Montgaillard and its environs were to attend the funeral, and fifty of them were to open the procession with hunting-tunes, waltzes, and minuets.

A Mr. J. Sergeant, of Leicester, a staunch upholder and practitioner of early rising, inserted a clause in his will to the following rather disagreeable effect to those concerned: "My nephews are fond of indulging themselves in bed in the morning, and I wish them to prove to the satisfaction of my executors that they have got out of bed in the morning, and either employed themselves in business or taken exercise in the open air, from five till eight o'clock every morning, from the fifth of April to the tenth of October, being three hours each day; and from seven to nine o'clock in the morning from the tenth of October to the fifth of April, being two hours every morning." This was to be done for some years, to the satisfaction of the executors, who were empowered to excuse the heirs in case of illness; but even then the task was to be made up when they had recovered—the penalty in case of non-performance of the conditions, being total exclusion from participation in the property. The reason given by Mr. Sergeant for these conditions were, that "temperance makes the faculties clear, and exercise makes them vigorous. It is temperance and exercise that can alone insure the fittest state for mental or bodily exertion." The inconvenience accruing to the recipients of this bequest was, however, far surpassed by that resulting from the condition attached to the will of a spiteful old citizen of Berlin, to the effect that the heir should always wear thin white linen garments, and at the same time indulge in no extra under-clothing. If this condition were only once violated, the money was to go to the executors.

Several of our London churches have had bequests made to them with rather strange conditions attached. In the window of the middle aisle of St. Mary's the mother church of the parish of Lambeth, is painted a pedler with his pack and dog, said to represent the person who bequeathed to the parish of Lambeth "Pedler's Acre," provided that his portrait and that of his dog were perpetually preserved in one of the church windows. When the painting was first put-up is unknown, but it existed in 1608. "Pedler's Acre," originally called the "Church Hopes," or Hopps (an isthmus of land projecting into the river), is entered in the register as bequeathed by a person unknown.

Another remarkable class of bequests is that in which the testator leaves the whole, or some part of his body, to one or more of his friends, to be used for the furtherance of science or art amongst his survivors. Such was the bequest of Professor Byrd Powell, an American physician and phrenologist. "Furthermore," ran the will, "I give and bequeath to Mrs. T. Kinsey, of Cincinnati, Ohio, my head, to be removed from my body for her use, by H. T. Keckeler, or his agents." The said Mrs. Kinsey was one of the professor's most enthusiastic pupils. Some weeks after the remains of this lover of his art had been placed in the vaults of a cemetery, the bequest was carried out, the executors of the deceased employing Dr. Curtis, of Cincinnati to take off the head, which forthwith came into the possession of Mrs. Kinsey. Dr. Gall, another phrenologist, who died in Paris in 1828, left a similar direction in his will.

In University College is the skeleton of Jeremy Bentham. This eccentric individual left his body by will to Dr. Southwood Smith, who wrote a letter on the subject to "Notes and Queries." "Jeremy Bentham left by will his body to me for dissection. I was also to deliver a public lecture over his body to medical students and the public generally. The latter was done at the Well Street School. After the usual anatomical demonstration was over, a skeleton was made of the bones. I endeavoured to preserve the head untouched, merely drawing away the fluids by placing it under an air-pump over sulphuric acid. By this means the head was rendered as hard as the skulls of the New Zealanders, but all expression was gone, of course. Seeing this would not do for exhibition, I had a model made in wax by a distinguished French artist. . . . I then had the skeleton stuffed out to fit Bentham's own clothes, and this wax likeness fitted to the trunk. . . . The whole was then

inclosed in a mahogany case, with folding glass doors; and I ultimately gave it to University College, where it now is."

In 1871, the New York Times stated that a Mr. S. Sanborn, of Medford, Massachusetts, latter, made and recorded a will by which he bequeathed his body to Professors Louis Agassiz and Oliver Wendell Holmes, of Harvard University, requesting that it should be prepared "in the most scientific and skillful manner known to the anatomical art," and placed in the museum of anatomy attached to the university. He also directed that two drumheads should be made of his skin, which were to be presented to his "distinguished friend and patriotic fellow-citizen, Warren Simpson, drummer, of Cohasset," on condition that he should beat, or cause to be beaten, on the said drumheads the national air of *Yankee Doodle*, at the base of the monument on Bunker's Hill, at sunrise on the 17th of June annually. On one of the drumheads was to be inscribed "Pope's Universal Prayer," and on the other the "Declaration of Independence," as it originated in the brain of its illustrious author, Thomas Jefferson. The parts of his body useless for anatomical purposes he desired to be "composted for a fertilizer for the purpose of nourishing the growth of an American elm to be planted, or set out, in some rural public thoroughfare, that the weary wayfarer may rest, and innocent children playfully sport beneath the shadow of its umbrageous branches, rendered luxuriant by my carcass."

These are but a few instances amongst many. We shall mention one more, that of Professor Morlet. This gentleman, who filled the chair of geology in the Academy of Lausanne for some years, left a clause in his will, directing that his head should still be made useful to science after his death, and that it should be preserved in the museum at Berne, with his name legibly engraved on the skull, so as to prevent its ever being mistaken for any other. His wish was complied with and the skull may be seen in the anatomical department of the collection at Berne.

We hear of a Mr. Zimmerman, who died in 1840, and gave by will particular directions for his funeral. "No person," he says, "is to attend my corpse to the grave, nor is any funeral bell to be rung, and my desire is to be buried plainly, but in a decent manner; and if this is not done, I will come again—that is to say, if I can." Quite as whimsical was the injunction of a Mrs. Reading, who by will in 1870, requested her coffin to be packed in a plain deal box, and sent to Branksome Tower by a goods train, so that the charge for carriage to the place of burial would be no greater than for an ordinary package. We do not know how this *post-mortem* attempt to cheat the railway companies succeeded.

The fear of being buried alive has often led to the attachment to wills of very strange clauses. The will of a Mr. John Lewis Grefulke, proved on October 8, 1867, contained an instance of this kind. It ran thus: "I do not wish to be buried, but that my body be embalmed and placed in a coffin, the lid of which shall be glazed, and not nailed down, so that the body be not deprived of air and daylight, and ultimately buried, if the law will permit."

Our contemporary, the *Illustrated London News*, has lately presented a number of amusing eccentricities of this kind. One of the cases quoted is that of a Mr. Budd, who left a particular estate to his eldest son, provided he did not wear a moustache; if he did, the estate was to go to his second son. Another case, equally whimsical, is that of Mr. James Robbins, who, in the event of his dear wife not complying with his request to wear a widow's cap after his decease, enjoined that she was to suffer a diminution of an annuity from £30 to £20; and she was to undergo the same penalty if she married again.

An amusing instance of carrying a joke beyond one's own death was that perpetrated in his will by Jasper Mayne, a humorous dramatic writer of the seventeenth century. In this document he left an old trunk to his man-servant, saying that he would find in it something to make him drink. When the funeral was over, the poor fellow hastened to enjoy his treasure, but, on opening the trunk, found only a red herring!

There could be given innumerable instances of *post-mortem* benevolence, often of a whimsical character. We content ourselves with the following: In a late number of the *Times*, there appeared an account of two curious customs which took place on Good Friday. One of them occurred just outside the church of St. Bartholomew-the-Great, Smithfield, in the oldest churchyard in the city. The venerable incumbent of the parish put down twenty-one sixpences on a gravestone, which the same number of poor widows picked up. The custom is nearly as old as the church, being the result of the will of a lady, who left money for the annual donation, and the preaching of a sermon. On the same day, at the church of All-hallows, Lombard Street, a sermon was preached under similar provisions of the will of Peter Symonds, dated 1587, and gifts distributed to sixty of the younger scholars of Christ's Hospital, each receiving a new penny and a bunch of raisins. Under the same will the children of Langbourn Ward Schools who help in the choir, and the children of a Sunday-school, received each a bun and various sums of new money, ranging from a penny to a shilling, besides a shilling and a loaf to each of the poor of the parish. The various gifts were distributed over the tomb of the donor, until it was effaced by railway operations.

NAPOLEON'S DEATH AT ST. HELENA.

In the exhibition this year in the Mechanics' Hall, Dumfries, there was shown, by Major Young of Lincluden, a lock of hair cut from the head of the Great Napoleon after death, a letter in connection with which is of some historical value. Hitherto French writers have represented that the *post-mortem* examination of Napoleon's body was unwarrantable liberty, taken in opposition to the deceased's wish. The letter was only discovered, along with the lock of hair, three years ago, by Major Young, in a secret drawer of an old writing-desk belonging to his father, to whom the epistle was written by Dr. Short, a native of Dumfries, who held the office of principal medical officer of the British staff at St. Helena, and who superintended the dissection. It is as follows:—

St. Helena, 7th May, 1821.

"My dear Sir,—You will no doubt be much surprised to hear of Bonaparte's death, who expired on the 5th May, after an illness of some standing. His disease was cancer in the stomach, that must have lasted some years, and been in a state of ulceration some months. I was in consultation and attendance several days, but he would not see strangers. I was officially introduced the moment he died. His face in death was the most beautiful I ever beheld, exhibiting softness and every good expression in the highest degree, and really seemed formed to conquer. The following day I superintended the dissection of his body—(at this time his countenance was

much altered), which was done at his own request to ascertain the exact seat of the disease, which he imagined to be where it was afterwards discovered to be, with the view of benefiting his son, who might inherit it. During the whole of his illness he never complained, and kept his character to the last. The disease being hereditary, his father having died of it, and his sister, the Princess Borghese, being supposed to have it, proves to the world that climate and mode of life had no hand in it, and contrary to the assertions of Messrs O'Meara and Stobo, his liver was perfectly sound; and had he been on the throne of France instead of an inhabitant of St. Helena, he would equally have suffered, as no earthly power could cure the disease when formed."

LORD BYRON AND LORD CADURCIS: MR. DISRAELI'S "VENETIA."

Mr. H. A. Bright, of Liverpool, to the *Athenaeum*:—The following autograph letter of Lord Byron has, so far as I know, never been published—and, whether published or not, has a curious literary interest attaching to it. It was given to me some twenty years ago, and the friend from whom I received it believes that he bought it at a sale at Sotheby's, in or about 1843. It is addressed to Sir Godfrey, Webster, Upper Brook-street, London, Angleterre;—Inghilterra (on the side). It bears the post-marks of Pisa and Milano, and the broken seal shows the Baron's coronet and the horse supporters of the Byrons, but the coat of arms cannot be properly made out, and, from what is left, I do not detect the three bendlets. The letter is as follows:—"Pisa, April 12, 1822. Dear W.—Why don't you take a turn in Italy? I should be delighted to see you again, which is far more than I shall ever say or feel for your island, or anything therein. They complain of my abusing England, my mother-country; a step-dame, I take it. I made out a list the other day of all the things and persons I have been compared to. It begins well with Alcibiades, but it ends with the Swiss giants, or the Polish dwarf—I forget which. I have now to add another description, sermonized by Parson Styles, depicting me as 'a denaturalized being, who, having drained the cup of sin to its bitterest dregs, is resolved to show that he is no longer human even in his frailties, but a cool, unconcerned fiend.' That's damnably cool—that's flat—Parson! Well, I hope that neighbour-loving divine's holy rage will not put you in bodily fear of being cannibalized by such an ogre as the author of sundry blasphemous works—should you cross the Alps. A fig for all their clamour—'Come one, come all'—we will fight it out. When I once take you in hand, it will be difficult for me not 'to make sport for the Philistine.' Now we look upon ourselves as something, oh! fellow with some pith—now we could lay it on. I think I see them wincing under the thong, the pompous poltroons. Sunburn me if I don't tan their asses' skins for them. As to what I have said about you, never mind, it was only behind your back, and, under those legitimate circumstances, why even our best friends cannot expect us to spare them. Pray reply; news are worth money.—Believe me, always, yours very affectionately,—BYRON." And now I wish to call your attention to a very odd circumstance—coincidence it cannot be. In Mr. Disraeli's "Venetia," Lord Byron is drawn under the name of Lord Cadurcis, and in Chapter IV. of Book VI., we have one of his conversations with Herbert (Shelly). Here is an extract:—"Now is not it the most wonderful thing in the world that you and I have met," said Cadurcis. "Now I look upon ourselves as something like, eh! Fellows with some pith in them.—By Jove, if we only joined together, how we could lay it on! Crack, crack, crack! I think I see them wincing under the thong; the pompous poltroons! If you knew how they behaved to me!" A few sentences more—and Cadurcis continues, "I made out a list the other day of all the persons and things I have been compared to. It begins well, with Alcibiades, but it ends with Swiss giants or the Polish dwarf—I forget which." Again in Chapter VIII. of the same book, Cadurcis says, "and then they complain of my abusing England, my mother-country; a step-dame, I take it." It is, then, apparent either that Mr. Disraeli made use of this, published or not, in writing the character of Lord Cadurcis; or else that this is one of the curious Byron forgeries of George Gordon, which attracted such attention in 1852. It illustrates either Mr. Disraeli's mode of workmanship, or that of the clever forger. Certainly the letter reads like a genuine letter of Lord Byron, and the handwriting appears undeniably in his autograph. The water-mark on the paper is a crown with *fleur de lis*, a sort of knot underneath, and the initials WS. interlaced together. I should add that the donor of this letter does not seem certain as to the date at which he got it; but if his impression is correct, it of course bears out the view that it is an undoubted autograph.

THE BURIAL-PLACE OF THE POET GRAY.

A correspondent says:—A few days ago I paid a visit to Stoke Pogis, and soon found myself "beneath these rugged elms, those yew-trees' shade," that I might see where Gray was laid; but though I took great pains to find it, I could nowhere see his name. At the moment when I began to despair of finding it, a person came out of the church, who showed me to a tomb—the one on which Gray sat when he wrote his soul-inspiring "Elegy."—"This," said he "is where he lies"; and after scraping away the rust and corrosion of a hundred years, I read the following epitaph, penned by Gray himself, to the memory of his aunt and his mother:—"In the vault beneath are deposited, in hope of a joyful resurrection, the remains of Mary Antrobus. In the same pious confidence, beside her friend and sister, sleep the remains of Dorothy Gray, widow; the tender, careful mother of many children, one of whom alone had the misfortune to survive her; she died March 11th, 1753." But not a line does it bear to tell of him who afterwards found his last resting-place beside her whose death he so touchingly recorded. As I did not conceal my surprise and astonishment at this, my attention was directed to a small stone, a tablet it could not be called, roughly daubed on the church wall, which was almost unreadable from neglect and decay; and which told that "in the tomb opposite rest the remains of Thomas Gray, author of 'An Elegy written in a Churchyard,' &c. &c., who died August 6th, 1771." Here, I thought, "in this neglected spot, is laid a heart once pregnant with celestial fire, which waked to ecstasy the living lyre;" and, for 28 years after his death, not a single line was written which told where his body lay. But in 1799 a monument was raised on the confines of the park in which the church is situate, "in honour of Thomas Gray, among the scenes celebrated by that great lyric and elegiac poet, and who lies unnoticed in the churchyard adjoining." I have sought to discover some members of his family, but have been told that there are no descendants, and that no one interest himself in the matter.