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I AM NEVER ALONE.

LINES BY LADY J.—S.

I am never alone at early dawn,
When the lark pours her gushing notes on high;
When the diamond dew-drop gems the lawn,
And the daisy opens her tearful eye:
I am never alone!—with fragrant hair,
The spirit of the first sweet hour is there!

In one glad prelude our songs arise—
“Thanks be to God for the earth and skies;
For the early dawn, the glittering dews,
The heaven of song, the glow of hues;
The life, the light, the love we share;—
Thanks for the thoughts of praise and prayer!”

I am never alone at warm noon-day,
When the breeze is drunk by the scorching heat;
When the lark hath hushed her thrilling lay,
And the flower shut up her odours sweet:
I am never alone!—for near me lies
The spirit of woods, with deep dark eyes;
And my heart is stilled as flower and bird,
For my soul that spirit of woods hath heard.

In low soft murmurs the sounds arise—
“Thanks be to God for the earth and skies;
For the glowing noon, the cooling glade,
For the sweets of rest, the calm of shade;
For the life, the love, the peace we share;—
Thanks for the thoughts of praise and prayer!”

I am never alone at evening's close,
When the twittering birds bid earth good-night;
When the insect hums round the laurel-rose,
And the bat flits low in the gray twilight:
I am never alone!—on bended knee,
The spirit of night doth pray with me.

THE WILL.

AN ENGLISH STORY.

No two persons were ever more unlike each other than were old Richard Symmons and his brother James. Richard was the pattern of what we are accustomed to call a “true English heart,” and his looks bore out the character well. A ruddy countenance, open as day, with locks almost entirely white, hanging around it like snow around a Christmas rose, and an erect, firmly-knit frame, formed the material case in which was enclosed as kind and generous a spirit as ever existed. Very different from the hale, hearty appearance of his brother, was that of James Symmons, and as different were his mind and character. James was a hunk, a curmudgeon, a miser; so, at least, said the whole village of Springwell, and the village had known him long, and formed its judgment from deeds as well as looks. Shrivelled, shrunken, squalid in aspect, James might be compared to a bottle of thin beer that time had soured into vinegar, whereas Richard, like more generous liquor, had only been mellowed and improved by age. James's pinching parsimony, it was said, had broken his wife's heart, and had driven his son, his only child, to the door—to wander over the earth, it may be a homeless outcast.

But these latter matters were partially forgotten at the time we write of, having passed a good many years before. As time had run on, the peculiarities of James Symmons had not become softened, but, on the contrary, increased in strength as he grew older. Though he had amassed considerable property, he lived in the meanest and most wretched way, keeping house, or rather hovel, alone, and denying himself even the necessaries of life. Most unlike this was Richard's way of living. He had been in business, had earned for himself a comfortable competency, and he enjoyed it in comfort. Richard had never been married, but he was not, therefore, without a family; for he had taken to his home and heart a widowed sister, who had been suddenly thrown destitute upon the world by her husband's death. And this sister had a daughter, who became the apple of old Richard's eye. She had come to his care a child, and each succeeding year, as she shot up into comely womanhood, had bound her more firmly to the good man's love. As she tripped up and down his dwelling, his affectionate eye followed her light and graceful motion with delight, and it was his chiefest pleasure to select for her with his own hands all those little adornments which he thought would become and gratify her. Then would he say, as her pretty rosy lips thanked him with a kiss on such occasions, “Ah, Luce! I am just giving thee a staff to break my own head. Thou look'st so handsome now with that bonnet and those ribbons, that all the young sparks must fall in love with thee. And what would thy poor old uncle Dick do without thee, girl?”

At other times he would aver, in the fulness of his heart, to his special crony the schoolmaster, as they sat with a mug of ale and the backgammon board before them, that his “Luce was fit to be a duchess, and that she had repaid what he had done for her a thousand times over and over; though he had done nothing but his duty, by his poor sister and her child, neither.”

But the worthy old man fell ill—became sick almost unto death. Illness was a thing Richard had scarcely known in his lifetime, and the attack reminded him forcibly of what health too often makes men forget, namely, the necessity of arranging his affairs so that things might go as he wished after his death. His property lay chiefly in houses, and he wished to give his sister a life-tenure of part of that property, and to constitute his niece ultimate heir to all. Without a will, this disposition of the property could not be made, as Richard's brother, who was heir-at-law, would otherwise be entitled to all. Richard had no enmity at his “poor miserable” brother, as he called the parsimonious James, but he knew that the latter had much more wealth of his own, than he ever could, or would use. Accordingly to provide for his dear Lucy and her mother, was Richard's object, and in order to accomplish this, the schoolmaster's talents were put in requisition: for the schoolmaster, as is the case with his class in almost every parish in England, was a will-maker—at least he had acted in that capacity frequently, and the honest man thought himself very perfect in the calling. To attain perfection in it, indeed, after this fashion of going to work, was no very difficult matter. He had one form for all cases; and, accordingly, when Richard Symmons communicated his wishes to him, the schoolmaster drew up a will agreeably to this form. According to his friend's wish, the schoolmaster himself was nominated executor—a post which he held in nine out of ten of all the will-cases with which he had to do.

When the schoolmaster came to old Richard's bed-room with the will, to have it signed and witnessed, Lucy sat by her kind uncle's bed-side, and, to use the beautiful language of Shakespeare,

—like the watchful minutes to the hour,
Still and anon cheered up the heavy time,
Saying, “What luck you?” and, “Where lies your grief?”
Or, “What good love may I perform for you?”

Her mother also was in the room, engaged in knitting what she hoped her brother would yet live to wear. Neither she nor Lucy knew of the commission which Richard had given to the schoolmaster; and when it was communicated to them, they were moved to tears, partly of gratitude and partly of affectionate anxiety. “Oh! dear uncle,” sobbed Lucy, “you will be spared to us yet!” “A little while, perhaps, Luce darling,” said the old man calmly, “but not long—not long now. The blow has been given, and the first high wind will bring down the tree. But come, let us have this matter settled, and I will be easy in mind.” The invalid signed the will, and, under the directions of the schoolmaster, Lucy and her mother put their names to it, along with his own, as witnesses.

After the completion of this deed, Richard lived several weeks in the enjoyment of tolerable health. But a second attack, of the same nature as the first, terminated his days. The schoolmaster, as executor, spared Lucy and her mother the painful task of directing the funeral ceremonies. For the first time for many years, James Symmons entered his brother's house, on the occasion of the burial. He had become more squalid and haggard than ever, and though evidently verging rapidly to the grave, still grasped at wealth with as keen a hand as ever. Some thought they observed on his countenance gleams of wild eagerness breaking at times, as if unconsciously, through the show of gravity which he wore, as he followed his brother to the tomb. Certain it is, that his disappointment was obvious to every one present when the will of the deceased was read, though all the village anticipated the destination of the property. The countenance of the miser fell when he heard the deed gone over, his knees shook, and he glared with his dark cunning eyes on the innocent inheritors, as if they had robbed him of his treasure. He had so much self-restraint as not to break out into abuse, but he would partake of nothing with the other friends of the family, and left the house with a drooping head, and with mutterings upon his lips. His character and peculiarities were too well known to his widowed sister and his niece for them to feel surprise at his behaviour.

About a week after the funeral, the schoolmaster, in his capacity of executor, waited on Lucy's mother, and informed her that it would be necessary to prove the will in the Prerogative Court, and proposed that she and Lucy should go with him to a friend of his, an attorney, in order to get the matter completed.

Of course this proposal was immediately acceded to. On reaching the attorney's chambers, the special will of Richard Symmons, drawn up and signed as already mentioned, was shown to the legal practitioner. He had not looked at it a few minutes, when he discovered it to be totally useless and invalid! By the established law of England, every devise, in such a will, to an attesting witness, is void, and of no avail. Lucy and her mother were placed in this position through the consummate ignorance of the person who had undertaken to be their guide in the matter. When the attorney, with a grave face and kindly tone, intimated this sad error, the heart of the poor widow sank within her, as she looked at her daughter, and as the recollection of the heir-at-law's character came across her mind. And, for the schoolmaster, who was really a worthy, kind-hearted man, his self-accusations were bitter exceedingly. But he tried to re-assure himself and his friends with the hope that the flaw would never be known, and that, if it were known, James Symmons could not be so cruel and unjust as to take away what undeniably was his deceased brother's wish to give to those who now had it. The attorney shook his head at the latter observation of the schoolmaster, and said, that “secrecy, to say the least of it, was much the stronger hope of the two.” To the preservation of silence on the subject, he at once pledged himself, and trusted that the flaw might not be heard of. The schoolmaster then departed with Lucy and her mother, all three, it must be confessed, somewhat depressed in spirits by the unexpected intelligence which had been conveyed to them. Lucy's heart, already sad for the loss of her kind uncle, was now still more saddened by the fear of her mother's having to encounter hardships in her declining years. The mother, again, was grieved at the thought of the effect which the discovery would have upon the prosperity of her daughter's whole life. And self-reproach was busy in the breast of the schoolmaster.

Alas! evil news spread fast. Whether James Symmons had himself observed the circumstance of the signatures at the reading of the will, and had afterwards discovered the legal consequences, or whether some other person had detected the error, and promulgated it, we are unable to say. But the flaw did come to the knowledge of James Symmons, and the cold-hearted miser, regardless of his brother's undeniable wishes, lost not a moment in taking advantage of it. The widow, within a few days after her own discovery of the fact, received a letter from an agent employed by her mean and cruel brother, which informed her that Mr. Symmons having learned that the will of the late Richard Symmons was improperly executed, was resolved to claim restitution of his just and legal rights as heir-at-law. The letter concluded with a base hint that the will had been extorted from Richard by improper influence. This was the only colour which the miser could invent for his unnatural proceedings.

On receipt of this communication, the widow again visited the attorney alluded to, and consulted him respecting the probable issue of a legal attempt to oppose the claims of James Symmons. The attorney candidly told her that he believed all men would allow the intentions of the testator to be correctly represented by the will, but that these intentions most certainly had not been made good in such a way as to stand a contest in court. Lucy's mother returned to her home, with the intention of giving all up to the greedy claimant, as soon as the few moveables which were her own could be taken away, and some arrangements made for providing herself and her child with another home. This resolution once taken, and notified to James Symmons, her mind became more easy, and the cheerful Lucy soon lightened her mother's heart still more, by detailing all her little plans for their mutual sustenance and comfort in future.

A few days passed over, and the widow and her daughter were seated in a humble dwelling in a retired corner of Springwell, and Lucy had taken in needle-work. They had removed in the morning from the late Richard's house. But let us leave them, cheerful and resigned, and turn to the miser. This day he has added another half, at least, to his wealth, and still he is in his old wretched hovel. Though the night is one of winter, he has no fire, but he lies in bed with his clothes on, and all the rags in his possession heaped above him to keep him warm. Yet this night all will not do, for he shivers incessantly. Ever and anon, however, the thought of his newly acquired wealth sends something like a glow through him. Lying in bed saves candles; this is also a part of his creed. Has he no remorse for turning a sister and her child to the door? It is hard to say what are his thoughts; but of late days he has seemed excited, though apparently more with joy than with any other feeling. But, hark! there is a tap