

It is continually so in life. The best laid plans, the most important affairs, the fortunes of individuals, the weal of nations, honor, happiness, life itself, are daily sacrificed, because somebody is "behind time." Here are men who always fail in whatever they undertake, simply because they are "behind time." There are others who put off reformation year after year, till death seizes them, and they perish unrepentant, because forever "behind time."

XXIII.

The Will.

Characters.—Swipes, a brewer; Currie, a saddler; Frank Millington; and Squire Drawl.

SWIPES. A sober occasion, this, brother Currie. Who would have thought the old lady was so near her end?

CURRIE. Ah! we must all die, brother Swipes; and those who live the longest outlive the most.

SWIPES. True, true; but, since we must die and leave our earthly possessions, it is well that the law takes such good care of us. Had the old lady her senses when she departed?

CURRIE. Perfectly, perfectly. Squire Drawl told me she read every word of the will aloud, and never signed her name better.

SWIPES. Had you any hint from the Squire what disposition she made of her property?

CURRIE. Not a whisper; the Squire is as close as an underground tomb: but one of the witnesses hinted to me that she had cut off her graceless nephew, Frank, without a shilling.

Swipes. Has she good soul, has she? You know I come in, then, in right of my wife.

CURRIE. And I in my own right; and this is no doubt the reason why we have been called to hear the reading of the will, Squire Drawl knows how things should be done, though he is as air-tight as one of your beer-barrels. But here comes the young reprobate. He must be present, as a matter of course, you know. (*Enter Frank Millington.*) Your servant, young gentleman. So your benefactress has left you at last.

SWIPES. It is a painful thing to part with old and good friends, Mr. Middleton.

FRANK. It is so, Sir; but I could bear her loss better had I not so often been ungrateful for her kindness. She was my only friend, and I knew not her value.

CURRIE. It is too late to repent, Master Millington. You will now have a chance to earn your own bread.

SWIPES. Ay, ay, by the sweat of your brow, as better people are obliged to. You would make a fine brewer's boy, if you were not too old.

CURRIE. Ay, or a saddler's lackey, if held with a tight rein.

FRANK. Gentleman, your remarks imply that my aunt has treated me as I deserved. I am above your insults, and only hope you will bear your fortune as modestly as I shall mine submissively. I shall retire. (*Going: he meets Squire Drawl.*)

SQUIRE. Stop, stop, young man. We must have your presence. Good morning, gentlemen; you are early on the ground.

CURRIE. I hope the Squire is well to day.

SQUIRE. Pretty comfortable for an invalid.

SWIPES. I trust the damp air has not affected your lungs again.

SQUIRE. No, I believe not. But, since the

heirs at law are all convened, I shall now proceed to open the last will and testament of your deceased relative, according to law.

SWIPES. (*While the Squire is breaking the seal.*) It is a trying thing to leave all one's possessions, Squire, in this manner.

CURRIE. It really makes me feel melancholy when I look around and see every-thing but the venerable owner of these goods. Well did the preacher say, "All is vanity."

SQUIRE. Please to be seated, gentlemen. He puts on his spectacles, and begins to read slowly. "Imprimis; whereas, my nephew, Francis Millington by his disobedience and ungrateful conduct, has shown himself unworthy of my bounty, and incapable of managing my large estate, I do hereby give and bequeath all my houses, farms, stocks, bonds, moneys, and property, both personal and real, to my dear cousins, Samuel Swipes, of Malt Street, brewer, and Christopher Currie, of Fly Court, saddler." (*The Squire here takes off his spectacles, and begins to wipe them very leisurely.*)

SWIPES. Generous creature! kind soul! I always loved her!

CURRIE. She was good, she was kind; and

brother Swipes, when we divide, I think I will take the mansion-house.

SWIPES. Not so fast, if you please, Mr. Currie. My wife has long had her eye upon that, and must have it.

CURRIE. There will be two words to that bargain, Mr. Swipes, And, besides, I ought to have the first choice. Did I not lend her a new chaise every time she wished to ride? And who knows what influence. . . .

SWIPES. Am I not first named in her will? and did I not furnish her with my best small beer for more than six months? And who knows. . . .

FRANK. Gentlemen, I must leave you, (*Going*)

SQUIRE. (*Putting on his spectacles very deliberately.*) Pray, Gentlemen, keep your seats, I have not done yet. Let me see; where was I? Ay, "All my property, both personal and real, to my dear cousins, Samuel Swipes, of Malt Street, brewer."

SWIPES. Yes.

SQUIRE. "And Christopher Currie, of Fly Court, Saddler."

CURRIE. Yes.

SQUIRE. To have and to hold, in trust, for the sole and exclusive benefit of my nephew,

Francis Millington, until he shall have attained the age of twenty one years, by which time I hope he will have so far reformed his evil habits, as that he may safely be intrusted with the large fortune which I hereby bequeath to him."

SWIPES. What is all this? You don't mean that we are humbugged? In trust! How does that appear? Where is it?

SQUIRE. There; in two words of as good old English as I ever penned,

CURRIE. Pretty well, too, Mr. Squire, if we must be sent for to be made a laughing stock of. She shall pay for every ride she has had out of my chaise, I promise you.

SWIPES. And for every drop of my beer. Fine times, if two sober, hard-working citizens are to be brought here to be made the sport of a graceless profligate. But we will manage his property for him, Mr. Currie; we will make him feel that trustees are not to be trifled with.

CURRIE. That we will.

SQUIRE. Not so fast, gentlemen; for the instrument is dated three years ago; and the young gentleman must be already of age and

able to take care of himself. Is it not so, Francis?

FRANK. It is, your worship.

SQUIRE. Then, gentlemen, having attended to the breaking of the seal, according to law, you are released from any further trouble about the business.

XXIV.

The English Sky-Lark.

Take it all in all, no bird in either hemisphere equals the English lark in heart or voice, for both unite to make it the sweetest, the happiest, the welcomest singer that was ever winged, like the high angels of God's love. It is the living ecstasy of joy when it mounts up into its "glorious privacy of light."

On the earth it is timid, silent, and bashful, as if not at home, and not sure of its right to be there at all. It is rather homely withal, having nothing in feather, feature or form to attract notice. It is seemingly made to be

heard, not seen, reversing the old axiom addressed to children when getting noisy.

Its mission is music, and it floods a thousand acres of the blue sky with it several times a day. Out of that palpitating speck of living joy there wells forth a sea of twittering ecstasy upon the morning and evening air. It does not ascend by gyrations, like the eagle and birds of prey. It mounts up like a human aspiration.

It seems to spread its wings and to be lifted straight upwards out of sight by the afflatus of its own happy heart. To pour out this in undulating rivulets of rhapsody, is apparently the only motive of its ascension. This it is that has made it so loved of all generations.

It is the singing angel of man's nearest heaven, whose vital breath is music. Its sweet warbling is only the metrical palpitation of its life of joy. It goes up over the roof-trees of the rural hamlet on the wings of its song, as if to train the human soul to trial flights heavenward.

Never did the Creator put a voice of such volume into so small a living thing. It is a marvel—almost a miracle. In a still hour you