

Literature.

AUNT SALLY'S WILL.

Old Sally Kent was dead; the miserly old woman had gone to her last home. All her money could not save her nor prolong for a minute the allotted days of her existence. She had economized and pinched herself in every way to increase her hoard, and now she had left it all behind to be spent by other hands than hers. The unfortunate grocer's boy who gave Sally a pinch of tea too little, and the butcher, who gave her a bony piece of meat, would never forget the scolding that saluted their ears at these times.

All this was over now. "Her wealth will do her no good now," piously muttered Farmer Claypole. "Nor anybody else, I reckon," added Betsey Harris, "for it do be said she hid most of it for fear of robbers. Oh my! wouldn't I like to get some of it." Betsey had been hired by Aunt Sally, as she was always called, when sickness confined her to her room. Betsey had accepted the situation gladly, for she was an avaricious young woman, and knowing that Sally had no near relatives, but hoped she might get some of her property for herself. The idea that Aunt Sally had hidden large sums of money seized upon her imagination. Many an hour, while her mistress was sleeping, did she spend in dreaming of and wishing for the hidden treasures, and wondering where they might be placed.

"She was a sharp one, old Sall," soliloquized Betsey. "She knew now to take care of her money. At any rate, p'raps she's left me something in her will, for she's no kin, and if I haven't been a good nuss to her while I've been here, and put up with all her scolding and grumbling as meek as Moses, may be I didn't know what I was up to, maybe not—oh no!" And Betsey put her little red pug up in the air in a highly complacent way that left no doubt on the mind of a spectator that Betsey knew pretty well what she was about. The corpse of the old woman lay in the next room, but Betsey was not very sensitive or superstitious. "She's dead and gone; only let me get some of her money that's all."

Aunt Sally had made a will. A few days before her death she had sent for lawyer Blackstone, and when this was known every one in the little village of Smithtown was on the alert to discover what she had done with her money. As is usual, her wealth had been greatly exaggerated. Betsey was as curious as any one. From the moment the lawyer entered the sick room her ear had been glued to the keyhole, and Aunt Sally talked so low that she could hear nothing. Once indeed, the lawyer mentioned her name, she was sure, and the sick woman had said something in reply, but what it was Betsey had no idea, and was consequently all the more curious. A noise in the room told her the conference was over, and that the lawyer had risen to depart. Quick as thought she darted from the door to the porch, and endeavored to assume a sad and sympathizing air, such as she deemed proper for the occasion.

Contrary to her expectation, the lawyer went out of the side door, thus avoiding Betsey, who was anxious to accost him. She did not wish to appear eager to question him, yet she must ask him about the will before he left. Her eyes fell on an old pitcher, with water standing in it, which was standing in the porch, and seizing it and a mug, she walked around the house and came full upon him.

He would have passed him with a nod, but she stopped right before him. "A warm day, Mr. Blackstone, and I'm feared very bad for sick folks." Here Betsey made an attempt at sighing, which was so unsuccessful that the lawyer could not help smiling. "Won't you have a glass of iced water? I was thinking you might be thirsty. I'd ha' put some molasses in it, but you know she keeps the keys," pointing to the room where Aunt Sally lay. "She's been a very careful woman. Lor! sir, you don't know how she saves. I reckon she's laid up a right round sum now."

The lawyer did not reply, but raised the mug of water to his lips. No sooner had he tasted it than he ejected it from his mouth with disgust. "She's been a very careful woman, Betsey, but I believe she always allowed you fresh water, and that is warm enough to boil your dinner in."

"You don't say so," said Betsey, not surprised at the remark. "I must have taken it from the top of the well. If you'll just wait a minute—"

"No, no, Betsey!" said the lawyer. "I'm not thirsty and you mistress may want you."

"Yes, of course, I'm going to her. I never leave her side morning nor night, except for a few minutes. Only last night the dear old lady said, 'Betsey, we shall have our reward in heaven. You must not eat any more butter than I've allowed you.' Oh, it was sad to hear the good woman speak so to me! I could not help it, I cried."

"Very affecting, I have no doubt," said Mr. Blackstone, dryly, as he moved toward the gate.

"Do you know," said Betsey, walking by his side, "folks do wonder a great deal how she left her money. You know she's no kin."

"Yes, I know," said the lawyer. "She has not forgotten her friends, I

hope," said Betsey, as they reached the gate.

"I hope not, Betsey," replied the lawyer, smiling as he thought how the dying woman had remembered her friends. "A close mouthed man; afraid to say a word. I hate such persons." And Betsey, smoothing her wrinkled brow, and assuming the meek and patient air which she fancied would gain the good-will of the invalid, entered the sick room. That night Betsey and the doctor were witnesses of Aunt Sally's signature. Next day Sally died.

The funeral was over. The small parlor which was so seldom opened, was crowded by persons eager to hear the will. Aunt Sally had invited some, and curiously detained others. In a clear, sharp voice Mr. Blackstone read the will. Those who were invited were especially anxious, each thinking that he or she was the fortunate person. In short, a coolness had already sprung up between them as soon as it was discovered that more than one had been asked. "All, however, were disappointed. Miss Sarah Kent gave the sick chair she had bought for herself to Mrs. Brown, hoping that she would find it more comfortable than she had. At this point, Mr. Brown, when he found that this was all the bequest left his wife, left the room amid the exultant looks of his rivals. Mrs. Brown was sick at the time, and Sally's gift almost killed her. She had the chair burned before it entered her house. To her neighbor, Mr. Whitson, who was the drunkard of the village, Aunt Sally gave the free use of her well. Mr. Whitson, sober for once, wished the departed in a hot place.

More exultant looks on the part of the few remaining candidates.

To Thomas Flint and wife she gave her Bible and "Whole Dut of Man," trusting they would peruse them regularly and profit thereby.

Two or more persons she remembered in the same way, to their indignation, bearing out the saying that the dead still live. Betsey's name had not been mentioned yet, and she secretly rejoiced over the disappointments of the others, although it had occurred to her she might be treated in the same manner.

To Betsey Harris, for her faithful attendance—Betsey's heart beat so loudly that she feared everyone might hear it—she gave her old shoes and stockings, assuring her that cleanliness was godliness, and a person could not be clean unless she wore shoes and stockings. Also her old writing desk, and the papers in it, which she might use to practise writing upon, a branch of her education which had been neglected.

The house and its contents, also the land attached thereto, she gave to John Mason, a poor, hardworking man, who had been trying in vain for years to lay by enough money to buy a house for himself.

The rest of the property, amounting to five thousand dollars, she gave to two poor families, who had been very unfortunate, and found it hard work to keep out of the poorhouse.

Such was the contents of Miss Sarah Kent's last will and testament. It was fearful to hear the indignant remarks of those she had especially invited to hear the reading, or as they said, invited to hear themselves insulted. But chiefest among the indignant ones was Betsey Harris. Her mighty wrath could not find vent in words; it burned within her. She stayed in the house the night after the funeral, and spent most of the time in railing at the deceased.

Morning found her but little appeased. "To think that I should have starved myself, and borne all her scoldings and grumbings without saying a word and all for nothing! Ugh! I could bite her for it. Shoes and stockings! as if she didn't know her slim shoes would never go over my trotters! An old writing desk—me practise writing! Why, the old thing is too rotten to stand moving. This is what I'll do with the old thing."

Betsey seized the old desk, and with a shove pushed it over. It was rotten as Betsey said, and came to pieces in its fall. A number of papers fell out, amid a cloud of dust, and scattered themselves around. They were written on one side, but on the other were blank. By chance a yellow envelope fell apart from the other papers, and attracted Betsey's attention. It was sealed; something might be in it. There was a piece of paper within, neatly folded.

Gracious powers was Betsey to be rewarded at last, and was the wealth she had dreamed of to be hers? Her head swam as she read the paper. The perspiration came out all over her; her legs trembled beneath her; she could hardly stand. It was some time before she recovered the use of her faculties. She carefully hid the envelope in her bosom, and pinned it there; then she looked around to see if any one had noticed her; then she walked around the house and closed the doors, so that no one might take her unawares. Finally she sat down and took out of her bosom the precious bit of paper. This is what was written thereon which had excited Betsey so much:—

"From the steps five feet six inches; from the house three feet; below the surface four feet. September 7, 1886."

How she gloated over the writing! Had it been the true receipt for the discovery of the philosopher's stone, she could not have read it with a more intense interest. She felt as certain that she would find

hidden treasures if she dug according to these directions as if she saw them before her. She was already rejoicing over her discovery.

"O Aunt Sall, wasn't you cute? Why was you so forgetful? They little knows what I knows. Let John Mason have the house. As if I didn't know that Aunt Sall left more than five thousand dollars! She left nigher twenty thousand dollars, I know. Now what's become of it all? She hid it; in course she did; and, Betsey, you're the person to find it. Only give me time. Oh, lor! if John Mason would move in to-day; what could I do? Gracious! gracious! I never thought of that. What a sin and a shame to throw this gift of Providence away! I can't dig in the daytime, because I should be seen. Oh, my! Oh, my, what can I do? I'll go and see Mrs. Mason at once."

She found her fears verified. The Masons evidently were preparing to move everything was in confusion. But Betsey pretended not to notice these preparations. When Mrs. Mason saw Betsey her face clouded.

"Oh, Betsey, there's no mistake is there? There hasn't been another will discovered, has there? or another John Mason found?"

"No," said Betsey, "leastways, not as I knows of. I guess you may feel sure of your good luck, and though it don't become me to tell of it, I guess I know whom you have to thank for it."

"Do you Betsey? do tell."

"Well, then," said Betsey, "just before Aunt Sally made her will, she said to me, said she,—

"Betsey, I wonder who'll have this house when I'm gone."

"So do I," said I. "You want some body who'll take care of it."

"Of course," said she; "Somebody who'll look out for the old place. Some one who ain't rich, but would live in the house themselves, and not rent it."

"I think," said I, "if I may be so bold as to say it—"

"Go on," says she.

"Well, John Mason is just the man. He is poor and honest, and a hard working man."

"That's very true," said she.

"He'll live in the house, and won't let it go to ruin," I added.

"Very true again," says she.

"I did not say more then, but I noticed she thought a good deal, and told me I had made a good choice."

"That was real kind of you, Betsey."

"Not at all, Mr. Mason. I likes to remember my friends. But lor! I'm staying too long. I'll be all ready for you when you come to-morrow."

"To-morrow, Betsey? Why we meant to move to-day."

"Did you?" said Betsy, as if she hadn't noticed preparations going on. "I don't think you can, for I'm fixing up, and I can't get the house ready before to-morrow."

"We won't be particular, Betsy."

"Oh, lor, Mrs. Mason! Aunt Sally told me just what she wished to be done, and I feel bound to do it. The wishes of the dead must be respected, you know. Good morning, and be sure to come to-morrow." Betsey hurried home, and Mrs. Mason told her family that they must wait till to-morrow.

Betsy had gained her point, and now had only to wait patiently for evening. How slowly the hours passed! The sun never seemed to be as long in setting, but finally it did set, and darkness came on. As soon as it was safe, Betsey commenced operations, but in the very beginning there was a difficulty. On which side of the steps should she count off the number of feet written on the precious paper? She had pickaxe and shovel all ready. There was no way of deciding the matter, and finally she chose the left side, and having counted off the number of feet from the steps, then from the house, she commenced to dig.

What high hopes animated Betsey in the work! All her visions were tinged with a bright rose color. She would leave Smithtown and go somewhere else. She would be sharp and saving, and lay up more money. She did not look further than making money. This would be happiness enough for her. She worked and worked and worked. To dig down four feet was no easy job. The ground was hard and stony, the pickaxe was very heavy, and her feet were sore long before she had dug two feet. She persevered, however, now and then turning up an old shoe or a bit of crockery ware. The hours wore on. Twice she found she had not made the hole large enough to work in, and twice she had to enlarge it. Every shovelful of dirt seemed to break her back. The perspiration dropped from her forehead and rolled down her face, but she bravely persevered. A little more and she would be deep enough. Dig, dig, dig! But she turned up nothing; in vain she sought for the large flat stone which she was confident covered the pot of money. Not even a brick could she find; nothing but dirt. Was she not deep enough? Yes; four feet by measurement. Poor Betsey! all this digging for nothing. She was obliged to rest. She ached all over, and felt thoroughly fagged out. She looked at the hole she had dug. She almost repented she had not told some man her secret, and got him to dig.

The village clock struck twelve; in a few more hours the village would be stirring. It would be all she could do to get through in time. She straightened herself and stretched her aching limbs; then

again with untiring energy set to work. But this time not rapidly, as before. She knew her strength would give out. More slowly she worked, therefore, but not less earnestly. One thought troubled her considerably. What excuse should she give for leaving the village? and how should she get the money? For the money she expected to find would be gold or silver coin, and in these times would arouse suspicions. The reflection worried her, she felt so sure she would find a pot of money.

Faint streaks of light were visible in the east. Farmer Claypole always drove into the village at half-past four to catch the morning train for Boston, where he sent his produce. What if he should find her at work? He would suspect at once. Four o'clock, and Betsey's spade touched a stone. Again she struck it, and felt it to be large and flat. Oh, joy! she had reached it at last. She was so sore and tired! but she could not rest a moment. In half an hour Farmer Claypole would be driving past. With renewed energy she set to work, and cleaned the stone of the dirt around it. She tried to lift it with her hands, but could not, she was so worn out. Again she tried, but with no better success; she could not move it, and it was growing late. The sun was bright in the east; the birds were singing from a thousand twigs; the whole earth seemed alive with joy and beauty, but Betsey heeded it not. All her senses were taken up in her work. She must get a crowbar; there was one in the shed, she knew. She could hardly lift it. The excitement which had animated her so long, and lent her a nervous strength, was leaving her. With difficulty she placed the crowbar under a corner of the stone. She must be quick; already she thought she heard Farmer Claypole's wagon coming down the road. She was wild; her eyes were staring out of her head; her mouth was parched, and her tongue half way out. She must not give up now; a few minutes more—one more effort! She was sure she heard wheels approaching. Avarice and the fear of disappointment again lent her a moment's strength. The stone moves! Could not the odor which arose have warned her? No; she had no sense of smell then. She was entirely lost in her eagerness to move the stone. Another exertion; the stone moved; there was room for her to insert her hand. She stooped down—she thrust her hand into the opening; a villainous odor arose; she touched something slimy and soft. She had opened the drain. She was dimly conscious that wheels had stopped before the house, that footsteps were approaching. She tried to rise and hide herself, but could not; her strength gave out entirely. She was utterly exhausted.

"Why, Betsey, the drain does not need clearing out. I cleaned it out myself last September," said Farmer Claypole, for it was he. There was a merry twinkle in his eye, for he knew Betsey's avaricious disposition, and remembered her remark about Aunt Sally's hiding her money. His words, however, were not heard by Betsey. The disappointment and mortification had been too much for her; she had fainted utterly away.

A week afterwards, and Betsey Harris left Smithtown forever.

Seeks Divorce.

FRANCIS H. BURNETT PREFERS TO BE SINGLE.

WASHINGTON, March 21.—Mrs. Francis Hodgson Burnett, the well-known novelist, Saturday instituted suit for divorce from her husband, Dr. Ivan M. Burnett. The papers in the case are with held from publication.

Mrs. Francis Hodgson Burnett was born in Manchester, England, but as she moved to America in her tenth year, and has here lived, written and married, Americans generally claim her as a countrywoman. She is famous as the author of "Lass o' Lowrie," "Little Lord Fauntleroy," "Through one Administration," and "A Lady of Quality."

Since the loss of one of her two children in 1890, the grief and sorrow have made a different woman of the once gay and society loving author. Her tastes in dress have changed with her feelings. Her health is poor and in spirit she is depressed.

Wales' Generosity.

I read the other day a pretty little tale illustrating the Prince of Wales' generosity of heart. Whilst in Denmark he was made the honorary Colonel of a cavalry regiment, and when his brother officers were entertaining him, knowing his tastes, they proposed to play baccarat after mess. One young lieutenant, after playing and losing heavily, threw up his cards and went off to smoke. The Prince later on discovered him plunged in the deepest misery. He invited his confidence, and found that he had lost far more than he could afford and would probably end his career by his own act, however, the Prince urged him to let him help him out with his dilemma, saying that he had only played the game out of courtesy to their guest. Ultimately the lad accepted a cheque, which freed him from all his liabilities; giving in his turn a promise that he would not gamble again.

A writer who, perhaps, means well, suggests to Sarah Grand that "The Beth Book" might be followed by "The Thecond Beth Book" and "The Nekth Beth Book." Thith ith the wortht thugstion we have theen lately in regard to bookth.

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