

QUEER BRITISH WILLS.

Many Freakish Bequests—An Effort to Promote Matrimony Gets Into Parliament—Shaking Dice for Bibles.

The Government is just now in a brouhaha with the Drapers' Guild over an attempt to divert a whimsical bequest of Thomas Howell, an Englishman, who died in Seville, Spain, as long ago as 1530. He must have been a firm believer in the blessings of matrimony, for, to encourage marriage among the poor, he included the following provision in his will:

"Item—I commaunde myne executors that I leve in S vyll that incontinant after my deathe they doo send to the Citie of London 12,000 duckats of gold, by bills of cambio, for to delivver to the House called Drapers' Hall; to delivver them to the Wardeynes thereof; and the said Wardeynes, so soon as they have receyved the same 12,000 duckats to buy therewith 400 duckats of rent yearly for evermore—in possession for evermore. And it is my will that the said 400 duckats be disposed unto four maydens being orphans—next to my Kynne and of bludde—to their marriage—if they can be founde—every one of them to have 100 duckats—and if they cannot be founde of my lynnage, then to be geven to other four maydens, though they be not of lynnage: so that they be orphans, honest, of goode fame, and every one of them 100 duckats, and so every yere for to marry foure maydens forever."

The "duckats" of Mr. Howell were so well invested and have increased in value so much that the annual dower of four "maydens" has not consumed the interest for several centuries, but it was accumulated from year to year, and then piled upon the principle so fast that the income now amounts to more than \$100,000 a year, enough to give dots to 400 "maydens" a year forever. One would think that the master and wardens of the Drapers' guild would apply it in that manner. Such a plan would certainly be carrying out the intentions of the donor, for, if it is well to make four brides happy every year, it is better to make 400 happy. Some way or other the matter has got into Parliament, and several plans for the disposition of the surplus have been proposed and rejected. The most popular is to divert Mr. Howell's philanthropy to the support of a school for orphan girls.

The archives of the Court of England are kept in Somerset house, a mighty building that lies between the Strand and the Thames embankment, and in which a great deal of interesting history has transpired. Some of the old rooms are filled with precious papers that are shown to the public on certain days, and any particular documents of public interest or importance can be examined privately upon application to the keeper of the rolls. Among the wills that are piled away there by the hundreds of thousands are some extraordinary examples of caprice, spite and eccentricity, and they continue to accumulate day after day. It is not a week since I saw in The Times, the will of an eccentric maiden lady who left the sum of \$25,000 to the vestry of her parish in trust to found a hospital for diseased dogs. A person who has money is entitled to determine how it shall be disposed of when he needs it no longer, and the courts of England have been very careful to carry out the provisions of eccentric wills regardless of the protests of heirs and public

opinion. I have mentioned several curious cases in these letters, before, but the files at Somerset house, if they could be searched, would show a multitude more.

An Irishman who died in the early part of this century in one of the outlying parishes of London undertook to test the devotion of his friends and acquaintances by making a list of 400 of them who were requested by written invitation to attend his funeral, which was held at 7 o'clock one cold winter morning in the parish church. Only 29 persons appeared. When his will was opened it was found that, having no natural heirs, he ordered his fortune to be divided among the persons who attended his funeral.

It is an odd thing for Sunday school children to be shaking dice for a Bible under direction of a vestry, but that, nevertheless, happens every year in the Church of St. Ives, Huntingdon, in obedience to the will of Robert Wild, who, more than 350 years ago, made a bequest of money, the interest upon which was to be used each year to purchase twelve Bibles for distribution among six boys and six girls of that parish. He provided that the recipients of his gifts shall be determined by chance, and that all the children in the parish are to shake dice for them in the church every Whitsun Tuesday.

The first game was played in 1533, and the cubes were shaken on the altar, but during the rule of the present rector, who is a conscientious person, a table has been rolled into the vestible for the purpose. The church warden keeps count, and the children shake one after the other, and the six boys and six girls who have the highest scores to get the Bibles. Those who happen to be tied shake again. In the evening the successful ones occupy front seats in the church, and the vicar preaches a sermon on the blessings of the scriptures and the evils of gambling.

There is a will in Somerset house which provides that the estate of an Austrian baker shall go to his sons upon the condition that they shall never read newspapers.

Another odd person disinherited his sons if they wore mustaches.

Another provided that his estate should be entailed forever upon the tallest member of the family. When the possessor died from generation to generation the living relative of the highest stature was to get the money.

You find practical jokes and a good deal of humor in some of the testamentary bequests. A bachelor who lived in the early part of this century was continually annoyed for years by the attentions and toadyism of six relatives, nephews and nieces, who were engaged in a jealous rivalry for his money. He must have often chuckled over the way he got even with them after his death, for he left six wills, which were identical. They all bore the same date, even to the hour and minute of signature, and the same witnesses, and did not vary in a word or punctuation mark, except in the name of the legatee. By each of these wills he bequeathed his entire estate to each one of his six heirs and then died and left them to fight it out.

A man of the name of Andrew Duckett of Holborn, who died only a few years ago, was a household servant during the earlier part of his life, and afterward accumulated a fortune in the saloon and brewery way. He died without heirs, and left his estate, which amounted to several thousand pounds to the care of the trustees of St. Andrews, who are to distribute the interest annually forever among the household servants of that parish

who serve continuously for seven years in the same employment and by their industry, punctuality and efficiency earn distinction. The annual distribution this year was made July 24, when 180 examples of domestic virtue received £5 each.

One of the most remarkable charities that have been established in England is due to Sir Walter Watts who was a man of many virtues and much ability. He lived in Queen Elizabeth's time and entertained her at his mansion in 1573. He was a member of Parliament for many years, a merchant of great wealth, and must have been eccentric, for he not only established a permanent almshouse, with pleasure grounds in front near the little town of Maidastone, for homeless and destitute persons of respectability, but he set aside a fund in trust for the daily entertainment of six poor travellers at a tavern in Ipswich—a town that is very familiar to the readers of Dickens and is not far from his residence at Gad's Hill. The tavern is known as the Poor Travellers House and over the quaint old door is an inscription as follows:

Richard Watts Esq.,
by his will, dated 22 August, 1579,
founded this charity
for six poor travellers,
Who not being Rogues, or Proctors,
may receive gratis for one night
Lodging, Entertainment,
and four pence each.

For more than three hundred years this charity has been bestowed upon poor wayfarers, and if all the men who have enjoyed its benefits could be marshalled in a column they would make a regiment. In one of his Christmas stories Dickens describes the celebration of a festival at the Poor Traveler's House.

At an Ipswich cemetery are found some queer epitaphs. Among others is this:

"She was what a woman ought to be;
She was deaf and dumb."

And this:
"Here lies I and my three daughters,
Died of drinking Cheltenham waters,
If we had stuck to Epsom salts,
We wouldn't be lying in these here vaults."

And this:
"Here lies the body of Deborah Dent;
Who kicked up her heels and away she went."

In a neighboring churchyard are the following graphic lines:
"She heard the angels calling her
From that celestial shore,
So she flopped her wings and away she went
To make one angel more."

But, speaking of spite in wills, there is among the files of Somerset house that of a man who had not lived happily with his wife but got even with her after death separated them. He recited in his last will and testament that she had never been grateful for his kindness, and stipulated that if she enjoyed the benefit of his money any longer she must earn it by walking barefooted around the market place on the morning of the anniversary of his death each year. Then she was to stand by the fountain in the middle of the town and read a paper confessing that she had shortened her husband's days by her unseemly behavior and was sorry for it. So long as she complied with these conditions she was to have the benefit of the income from his entire property which amounted to many thousand of pounds. If she declined, the property was to be divided among distant relatives, who jointly were to give her an allowance of £20 a year "to keep her off the parish." It would be interesting to know whether this unfortunate wife decided to take the whole or only a little of her husband's fortune.

Another husband got even with a scolding spouse by proving in his will that she should inherit his property, which amounted to £60,000 only on the condition that she spent two hours each day rain or shine beside his grave for ten years, "in company with her sister whom I have reason to know she loathes more than she does myself."

Not long ago a miserly person, who had been teased almost to death by his heirs, endeavored to cheat them out of his money.

Before he died he left positive instructions that he should be buried in a certain suit of clothes. His wish was carried out but after the funeral his surviving relatives could find no will and no money. Finally one of them suspected that the old man had served them a shabby trick and suggested that the body be exhumed and the clothing examined. This was done, and the coat, waistcoat and trousers were found to be lined with Bank of England notes.

One of the most curious legacies I have heard of was that of an ardent stamp collector who died a few years ago, and in his will provided that his collection should be distributed among surviving stamp collectors in England who possessed examples of that rare and valuable stamp known as the "Middlebury" which was issued by the town of Middlebury, Vt., before the days of Government postoffices. It took several years for the executors to determine that it was impossible to carry out this bequest, because there are no Middlebury stamps in England, and therefore they wisely decided to leave the whole

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lot to the British museum.

The most important and expensive philatelic exhibition ever made is now in progress in London under the direction of the Duke of York who is an enthusiastic stamp collector and has been a daily attendant. Some of the collections are valued at \$500,000. A Mr. Beeton contributed a collection of 3000 stamps from Greece along. Mr. H. Durveen of the United States showed a two cent stamp issued by British Guiana for which \$3500 has been refused. He had one of the famous "Middlebury" stamps, which is worth \$1500. The Duke of York and Lord Rothschild were among the largest exhibitors.

The highest price ever paid for a postage stamp was given in 1893 by Stanley, Gibbons & Co. of London, who purchased for £680 two 2-penny stamps issued by the colony of Mauritius in 1847. These are said to be the rarest stamps in the world, and the only examples of their kind in existence. In 1847 the postmaster-general of Mauritius ordered a set of stamps, and by the blunder of the printer the words "post office" were engraved where the words "post paid" should have been. Only a single sheet was issued before the mistake was discovered, when the remainder of the edition was destroyed. Only two stamps are known to have been preserved, and they are now on exhibition.

There is a curious complication in regard to the stamps that were issued to commemorate the Diamond Jubilee. They were pro-

posed by the Duke of York, were engraved by the Treasury Department, but the Post-office Department declined to recognize them for postal purposes because the proceeds of their sale were to be devoted to the hospital fund of the Prince of Wales. The edition was comparatively small and the plates were destroyed by the Duke of York in the Bank of England the other day. While they lose much of their value to collectors because they were repudiated by the postmaster general, and cannot be used for postage, it is predicted that they will be all the more precious in future years for the same reason. They are the only stamps that were ever issued by one department of the British Government and repudiated by another.

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will restore you to complete, perfect health. It gives relief at once. It cures in an incredibly short time. Hundreds of cases of from 5 to 20 years' standing have been cured—cases that physicians had pronounced incurable. The catarrhal powder acts like magic, not only in catarrh, but in colds, sore throat, tonsillitis, hay fever, loss of smell, deafness and all similar diseases.

Mr. C. G. Archer, of Brewer, Maine, writes as follows:—"I have had catarrh for several years. Water would run from my eyes and nose for days at a time. About four months ago I was induced to try Dr. Agnew's Catarrhal Powder, and since using the wonderful remedy I have not had an attack. I would not be without it." At druggists.

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