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**GEOFFREY HAWKHURST'S WILL.**

BY EYRE HUSSEY.

The old Squire of Rippington, Geoffrey Hawkhurst, was dead and gone and laid to rest in the family vault in Kippington Churchyard; some said it was a good thing, too; others, after calm consideration and recollecting sundry favors were of opinion that the old gentleman was not so bad as he might have been, but the remark of one old crony, that "he'd never bide where they'd put him," sank down into many minds unenlightened at that time by Broad-school education.

The squire's will, dated five years previously, left everything to his nephew, Reginald Hawkhurst, to the exclusion of Lettice Beauclerk, nee Hawkhurst, the old man's only daughter. She had married against his consent, but there was no peculiarity in that, for nothing would have persuaded him to give his consent to her marriage with any man living. Nevertheless a reconciliation had taken place. The lawyers asserted that there had been a later will, and diligent search was made, in which Mr. Reginald Hawkhurst took a prominent part, so prominent, in fact, that Eustace Beauclerk remarked to his wife:

"It's my belief that Reginald knows all about it."

"He is very kind and straitforward; I don't agree with you," his wife replied.

"Very likely, my dear; you wouldn't be the sweet little woman you are if you thought differently; you judge others by yourself. I, on the contrary, opine that Reginald with all his smooth-faced plausibility would rob you of a red-hot stove if he could carry it away."

"Poor Reggie! Don't be hard on him."

"Not I; he's got the pudding, though your father never intended him to have it, and I have got the plum. He has done away with the old man's will, I'm certain of it, but—"

Eustace stopped short and kissed his bonny little wife.

The medical man who had attended the case had sought in vain to obtain permission to make a post-mortem examination—medical science seventy years ago was less advanced than it is now. He had no doubt of the cause of death, but he would have liked to obtain a closer knowledge of the effects of the malady. So he thought it over and determined to obtain by stealth what he could not arrive at openly. It was not unusual in those days.

A dun mare attached to a spring cart stood disconsolately with drooping ears in the shadow of the churchyard wall of Rippington. It was a cold, starlight night in December with a pinch of black frost crisping the turf and causing the dead leaves to rustle. A fine old yew tree spread its limbs in solemn benediction over the crumbling gravestones and filtered fitfully the ray of a crescent moon which was gradually sinking towards the horizon.

Two figures made their way stealthily towards the Hawkhurst vault, keeping close to the northern wall of the church. The older man was wary and methodical, the younger showed reluctance.

"I don't half like this job, Bill," he said as they halted at the iron railings. "It's a swinging job if we're caught."

"Lor, it's nothing when you're used to it, and it's easier to earn twenty pounds like this 'ere than any way else. I likes to be amongst old friends." He chuckled grimly. "And as for being ketched, there's not a soul in Rippington would face this 'ere."

From a sack he carried under his arm he produced a white smock frock which he placed upon a stick, stretching the sleeves upon another stick tied transversely; a battered beaver hat surmounted the whole, and Bill chuckled again.

"Darned if it ain't like 'im as two peas," he said. "Now have a such at this here bottle, Jim, and we'll get out the squire hisself."

The masons had not fixed the stone which covered the steps leading to the vault. Bill's crowbar raised it easily, and he descended cautiously before he lit his lantern. Jim hesitated, but the rum in the black bottle gave him courage and he followed.

"I owes 'im a grudge—he 'oswhipped me once—but I allow he's pretty quick now," Bill said, deftly plying a screw-driver.

"Too-oo-oo" up above made Jim start and nearly upset the lantern.

"Lor! bless 'ee, what be you scared about? Dead folk holds their tongues. Have 'ee never heard an owl?"

"I thought I heard footsteps," Jim said apologetically.

"Steps? There won't be no steps while

that there keeps guard up above. Lend a hand now. Ned Syers said there wasn't no lead coffin 'cos he helped carry it. There he is! He've a-cussed me a sight of times; it's odd not to hear him begin."

In a few minutes the corpse was clothed in some old garments, and the two men bore it up the steps and replaced the stone, Jim breathing more freely when he reached the outer air; in five minutes more the dun mare was in a slinging trot, the body of the old squire crowned with the beaver hat seated up between the two men in the trap.

"Glass of rum hot at the 'Dog and Gun' wouldn't be amiss, Jim," Bill said, breaking a silence. "The old gentleman ain't good company, somehow, and we mustn't be at Fordington before midnight."

Jim acquiesced; the trap was drawn up in the shadow of the inn, the reins placed in the old squire's dead hands, and the two men disappeared within.

All was cold and silent. The old squire's chin drooped upon his chest, and the listless hands were kept together by the reins. Presently Isaac Prince, the landlord, came to the door and stood just outside, tall and gaunt in his shirt sleeves, a costume which he adopted in all weathers during business hours. He was as like the old squire as two peas, though a considerably younger man; some said there were reasons for it, but then people will say anything.

"Goid," he said looking at the figure in the cart. There was naturally no reply.

"Tired of waitin'? It don't do to sleep out o' door. Can I get 'ee aught?"

The stillness of the figure excited Isaac's curiosity; he walked round the trap, gazed up and then said half aloud, "Lord! That's it, is it? Blessed if it ain't the old squire!" Isaac listened to the voices within; there was no sign of movement. The warmth he knew was seductive. In a few moments his strong arms had lifted the corpse from the trap and borne it across the road to the little dell opposite. There Isaac reverently laid it down, divested it of the coat and hat, slipped them on, returned to the trap, mounted, took the reins, and adopted as nearly as he could the limp attitude of the corpse. The time seemed long, but Bill and Jim returned at last and unsuspectingly blundered into their places. Isaac gathered their destinations as he lurched first into one and then the other he waited till they came to a spot where a high wall bordered the road on the one side and a bushy fescue with a deep ditch beyond it on the other, then he dug his elbow sharply into Jim's ribs as being the more nervous of the two.

"Bill," Jim whispered huskily, "he nudged me!"

"Not he; he's done with nudging. You be timid, you be, Set up, can't 'ee!" Bill said, pushing the corpse, which lolled against him. Presently Isaac's elbow struck his ribs.

"Durned if he didn't nudge me," Bill exclaimed uneasily.

Isaac waited again and then made a savage dig on either side of him.

"Did you feel that?" both men exclaimed together.

"Durned if his hands ain't hot!" Bill exclaimed.

"It's hotter than that where I came from and where you're going," Isaac said in a sepulchral voice.

"God in Heaven, it's the old 'um himself!" Bill shouted, abandoning the reins and springing out of the trap. Jim was gone also, and Isaac uttered a fiendish roar. Bill sprang wildly at the fence and disappeared into the ditch beyond, with Jim on the top of him, the two clutching one another and fighting desperately in the darkness, each under the impression that he was held in satanic clutches. They fought till they were exhausted and then lay still in the mud and water, neither daring to move.

Isaac sat listening to the smothered curses and sounds of battle, then he edged the mare on to the grass by the roadside and made his way home by a by-road, knowing well that neither man would dare to claim the mare and trap.

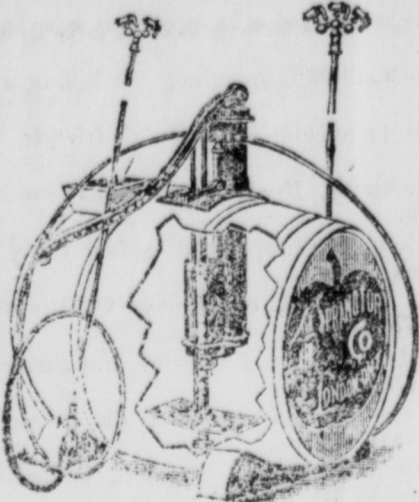
Two hours later Isaac Prince conveyed the body of the old squire back to its resting-place. He went alone and unaided; it was a work of restitution, so he had no fears, but he made some strong remarks to the body with regard to the treatment of "Miss Lettice that was."

"However can you expect to lay quiet, turning her out of her natural house and home and putting that wastrel in her place? If I'd been Thomas Sneath I'd have lined this coffin with clout nails, durned if I wouldn't! Maybe he did."

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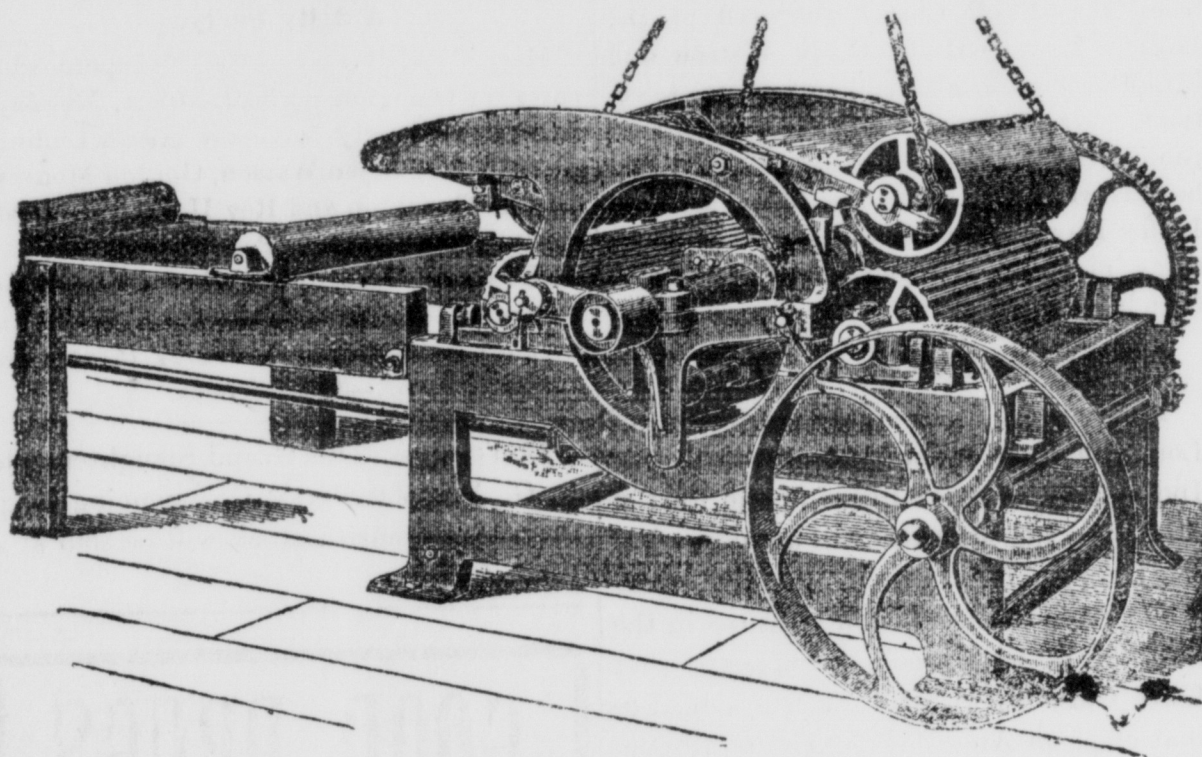
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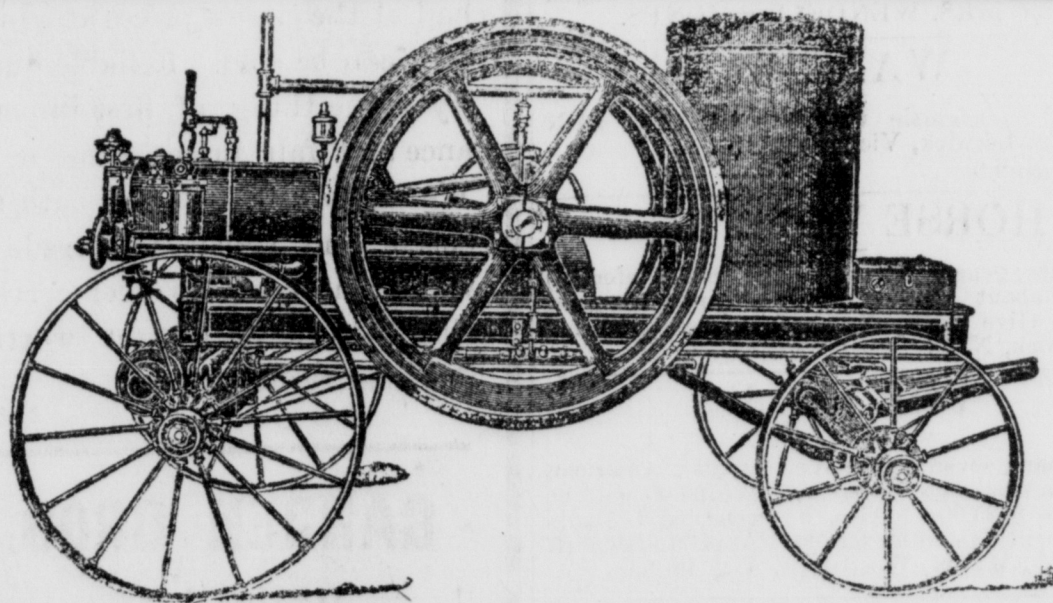
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Isaac raised his lantern from the floor and passed his hand over the lining of the coffin in search of nail points; presently there came the crackle of paper, and the landlord of the "Dog and Gun" withdrew a long blue paper. The lantern threw a dim light on the surroundings, but it was sufficient to enable him to decipher the superscription:

"The last will and testament of Geoffrey Hawkhurst." He turned it over and over in silence and then put it carefully in an inner pocket of his coat.

"Maybe this will make a difference; if so I asks your pardon for my remarks," he said. "Laid right under the old gentleman, too! I wonder who done it?"

Isaac Prince hoisted up the remains of Geoffrey Hawkhurst and placed them in the coffin, screwed down the lid, made all tidy, and retired, carefully replacing the stone above the fight of steps. He whistled for company as he walked home, and then fell to meditating on some plan for landing over the will to those concerned without exciting suspicion. If he took the document to the lawyer he would have to give an explanation; if he took it up to the great house there would be the same difficulty. No wonder his wife thought him unusually restless that night.

Fortune is said to favor the brave; whether she does or not, unforeseen circumstances undoubtedly arise at times which help to shape the ends of destiny.

With the ostensible purpose of purchasing some meal for his pigs at the mill Isaac Prince made his way towards the village on the following day.

The footpath made its way through a copse with the ground falling slightly on either hand; near the manor house another path-way crossed it at right angles, a stile marking the entrance to the park. To the right Isaac could see Mr. Reginald Hawkhurst flourishing his cane and looking round him with an air of proprietorship, to the left Mrs. Beauclerk followed slowly so as not to overtake her cousin.

Isaac grinned, hurried forward, placed the blue envelope at the foot of the stile, and disappeared behind an ivy-covered stump to watch results.

Presently Mrs. Beauclerk arrived, picked up the envelope, uttered a low cry, and stood perfectly still, glancing at the retreating form of her cousin.

"He had it all the time, and now he has dropped it," she said aloud in the tone of a person convinced against her will. Her eyes glittered, and she looked very beautiful.

Isaac in hiding rubbed his hands together.

Two persons always considered that to be the solution of the mystery of the disappearance of the will. Possibly it went as near the truth as do the solutions of many mysteries in this world. Reginald's hands were tied; he could only swear to himself, and that he did freely.—The Tatler.

### The Wisdom of The Mikado.

To one who will study closely the history of modern Japan it will not be difficult to account for its rapid rise among the powers of the world. Soon after his accession to the throne the mikado proclaimed five articles which at once expressed strongly his liberal-mindedness and directed the course of the national development. The articles are given in an article by Jihel Hashiguchi in the current issue of The Independent, and are as follows:

1. Councils of men shall be encouraged throughout the country, and the affairs of state shall be administered in accordance with public opinion.
2. All men, whether of high stations of life or of low, shall with the united mind, look after the welfare of the country.
4. For the civil and the military officers to the general public, all shall have the satisfaction of their minds, so that no one shall have any cause to complain.
4. Old order of things inexpedient shall be removed from us and the laws of the universe shall be obeyed.
5. Knowledge shall be sought in all the world in order to strengthen the foundations of our empire.

### The Thirsty Man's Ruse.

The man with a chronic thirst strode rapidly into the saloon and ordered a taste of Kentucky care-remover.

Pouring out a drink that would have flooded the New York subway, he prepared to toss it off.

First, however, he paused and asked if he could have a solution of alum.

"What for?" asked the astonished smile concocter.

"To drink first an' narrow my throat up so's it'll take th' hicker longer t' trickle down," replied the thirsty man.

### Tea Cigarettes.

(London Good Health.)

London fashion devotees are said to be giving up morphine tablets in favor of cigarettes made from carefully blended green and black teas, the nervous effects of smoking which are even more powerful than those produced by tobacco. Dizziness, partial stupor and extravagant visions are given as the leading symptoms, victims having frequently to be sent to private sanitariums.