

## LITERATURE, &amp;c.

## The British Magazines.

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## THE WILL.

BY ANNA MARIA SARGEANT.

ABOUT the middle of the eighteenth century, Oakwood Hall became, by purchase, the property of a gentleman named Willoughby. To the former owner—the last representative of an ancient family, who had dissipated a large fortune in extravagance—the new proprietor was a complete contrast, being parsimonious in the extreme. The halls which had once resounded with merriment were now deserted, except by the swallows and martins, which built their nests in the recesses of the richly-painted windows, and flew at pleasure through the many apertures which were suffered to remain unrepared. Instead of the almost princely train of attendants the young marquis had in waiting, the new occupant hired but three domestics—an elderly woman, who performed the duties of housekeeper to this meagre establishment; a man who filled the several offices of butler, footman, and gardener; and his wife, who acted as both cook and housemaid. Mr Willoughby was a bachelor and a valetudinarian, and he had chosen this spot on account of its retirement and the salubrity of the air. The principal part of his life had been spent in India, where he had amassed considerable wealth, but his declining state of health had obliged him to return to his native land. He was one of those characters who may be said to be spoiled by prosperity. Having met with unusual success in his own undertakings, he had become ungenerous in his opinions of those to whom fortune had been less kind; and towards his dependents he was exacting, tyrannical, and overbearing. The chief aim of his existence had been to accumulate wealth; but this accomplished, he was incapable of enjoying the blessings it might have purchased. The constant companion of this miserable old man was an orphan niece, the daughter of a deceased brother; and the adoption of this child was the only benevolent act he was ever known to perform. Some gleam of natural affection had warmed his sordid nature when his dying relative had intreated him to succour his friendless and portionless girl; but his subsequent conduct towards her proved that the protection he had for so many years afforded her was purely selfish. When he became the subject of a debilitating disease, no one else would endure his impatience and fretfulness, more especially as his domestics were but ill requited for the services they rendered him. The patience with which this gentle creature endured the ill-humour of her invalid uncle was by many attributed to interested views, it being generally supposed that she was to become his heiress; but such persons wrongly estimated the character of Gertrude Willoughby: her unremitting attentions and meek forbearance sprang from a deep sense of gratitude. Her aged relative had, she said, been a father to her in her utmost need, and she deemed it her duty to repay the debt by fulfilling a daughter's part.

Mr Willoughby was a bigoted professor of religion, though lamentably deficient in practical piety; and the Rev. Mr Vivian, the rector of the parish, was the only person who was ever received as a guest at the inhospitable mansion. The young churchman was handsome, talented, and accomplished: it was therefore no matter of surprise that he should make an impression on the warm and susceptible heart of his fair inmate. From the hour when she was bereft of her natural protector, she had never till now met with a congenial mind. The attachment was mutual; and she was too little versed in the cold policy of the world, to take it once into consideration that her uncle might object to the union. Though Mr Vivian was without personal property, he thought that as his family was unexceptionable, and his talents were likely to gain him preferment, there could be no reasonable objections to the match. He calculated also on the favor with which the old man had regarded him. But love and the sanguine spirits of youth had deceived him; for no sooner did he propose himself as a suitor for the young lady, than her uncle, in a fit of ungovernable rage, peremptorily ordered him to quit the house, and never more to enter it. To the sordid heart of Willoughby all appeal was useless. It was his determination that if his niece ever married, it should be some wealthy person; and he was, moreover, too dependent upon her for his daily comforts, to make a sacrifice for her happiness. The unfortunate girl had therefore to endure an augmentation of spleen for what he termed the rector's temerity and her ingratitude.

Gertrude now found her position almost insupportable. A sense of duty had hitherto chained her to the sick couch of her relative; but now that he had acted so unkind a part, she began to question if any moral obligation really bound her to devote her life to his service. Her lover, meanwhile, importunately urged his suit by letters sent through the medium of one of the domestics. He could not but be aware that any step taken by Miss Willoughby against the wishes of her uncle would probably deprive her of his fortune; but he was too sincerely attached to her to allow any mercenary considerations to influence his conduct. He pleaded that his living was sufficient to provide them with all the comforts of life; its luxuries, he said, neither of them desired. The result of this correspondence was, that after a brief period of hesitation, Gertrude

voluntarily left the Hall to become the wife of the young churchman, and mistress of the humble parsonage. The rage of the old man at the desertion of his niece knew no bounds, and it operated so powerfully upon his health, that he became a more confirmed invalid than before.

I must now introduce a new, but not unimportant personage, to the reader: this was Mary, or, as she was usually termed, Molly Hawkins, the housekeeper at the Hall. Strange stories were whispered in the cottages concerning this woman's early history; but all that was really known of her was, that she came with her daughter, then a young woman of two or three-and-twenty, to reside in the village, a few months prior to the purchase of the estate by Mr Willoughby, and that she was immediately engaged in his establishment. The powerful influence she appeared to have over a man who would permit no one else to oppose his wishes, was a matter of surprise. That influence had not been exerted to promote the interests of her master's protegee; and now that she had given him some grounds of complaint, she failed not to do her utmost to aggravate her young mistress's offence. So completely did her plan of separating the uncle and niece succeed, that the old man positively refused every solicitation made by Gertrude to be admitted again to his presence, though she had afterwards reason to believe that the letters containing these appeals had been intercepted by the wily attendant, who, now that Willoughby was wholly confined to his chamber, seldom quitted his side for an hour.

The continued displeasure of her relative was the only barrier to the young wife's happiness; for she entered on her new duties with delight, and fulfilled them in a manner which reflected the highest credit upon her character. Hers were the quiet unobtrusive virtues which shine most conspicuously within the hallowed circle of home; but as mistress of the rectory, she had a far wider sphere of usefulness than when the humble dependent of the niggardly master of the Hall. Her liberal hand was now open to relieve the temporal wants of her husband's poor parishioners, and she was no less willing to co-operate in administering to their spiritual necessities. How much good may be accomplished through the instrumentality of a pious and amiable woman, who devotes her days to offices of charity, the records of eternity will alone unfold.

Many years glided on thus tranquilly, when an incident occurred which effected an unlooked-for change in the rector's family.

The parsonage-house was situated on an eminence commanding an extensive view of the surrounding country; the Hall was, however, only discernible from the window of one of the Chambers. When Gertrude first became an inmate of the dwelling, she was wont to visit this apartment, that she might cast a glance at her late abode. Long association had made her uncle more dear to her than she herself had deemed possible; but as year after year passed, and he took not the slightest notice of her, all hopes of a reconciliation ceased. It was the evening of the seventh anniversary of her wedding-day; she was now the mother of a little fairy, who made her home even more happy than heretofore. She felt, however, on this occasion some renewed yearnings of affection towards the protector of her helpless youth, and she escaped from the cheerful fireside, and the more than usually gay circle which were gathered there, to spend a few minutes in meditation at the little casement. The night was dark, and she could not discern the mansion, but she fixed her eyes in the direction, and called down a blessing on the head of its occupant. A sudden blaze of light here attracted her attention, and curiosity was changed to alarm when she observed that it increased in magnitude. 'The Hall is on fire!'—the Hall is on fire!' she shrieked forth; and her cry brought her husband and children to the spot. Her surmise was too true: some combustible matter had by accident ignited in the servant's offices, and the left wing of the building was enveloped in flame and smoke.

Unpopular as Mr Willoughby's parsimonious spirit had made him amongst the villagers, they for the sake of his amiable niece, were not slow in rendering assistance. The man-servant came running to solicit it just as Mr Vivian was summoning them to the duty. The devastating element in the meantime destroyed nearly the whole of the wing; and the miserable old man, who was lying totally helpless in one of the chambers, was with difficulty conveyed by his two female domestics to a cottage in the vicinity. Here Gertrude and her husband found him in a state of terror which had almost bereft him of reason. The meeting was affecting in the extreme. Seven years had elapsed since they had seen each other, and those years had wrought a great change in the aspect of the invalid. He appeared more like some ghastly specter than a living being. He survived the shock but a few days, and the only sane sentences he was heard to utter were violent self-accusations for having wronged his innocent niece.

These observations naturally led Mrs Vivian to suppose that the property had been willfully away from her. Great, therefore, was her surprise, when, in a deed-box which had escaped the fire, a will, duly signed and sealed, was found, making her his sole heiress. This document bore the date of the year in which the testator had taken up his residence at the Hall.

It is here necessary to state, that after assisting her fellow-servant in conveying her master from the flaming mansion, Molly Hawkins had been seized with a fit of paralysis, which deprived her of speech and consciousness. She

lay for some weeks in the cottage of her daughter, who was now married to a labourer, and still resided in the village; and here she breathed her last. Judith Hawkins, or rather Judith Dawson was disliked and shunned if possible even more than her mother had been. The poor man who was so unhappy as to make her his wife was little better than an idiot, and she consequently exerted undisputed authority in the family. This woman violently and pertinaciously persisted that the Hall, and the immense wealth left by the late Mr Willoughby, was her mother's; that it had been willed to Molly by that gentleman in consideration of her long and faithful services; and that there was a document yet in existence (though it had been suppressed by the persons interested) which would prove the truth of her statements. These assertions greatly effected the sensitive mind of Gertrude. She thought it not improbable that her uncle had in a fit of anger willed away the property which he had previously designed for her. His dying words in a great measure corroborated the supposition; yet, as justice was certainly on her side, and the pretended heiress lay in a state which gave no prospect of light being thrown upon the subject, she hesitated not to take possession of the disputed wealth.

The Hall underwent partial rebuilding and thorough repair, and the rector's family subsequently left the little parsonage and took up their abode in it. Mr Vivian was now a rich man, but he was too deeply interested in the profession to which he had devoted himself, to relinquish it because he no longer stood in need of its emoluments. He merely engaged a curate to assist, to whom he paid the whole of the proceeds of the living, and still dwelt among his flock like a father among his beloved children. Gertrude had it now in her power to exercise benevolence without making those self-sacrifices which she had hitherto done, and she and her husband went hand in hand in works of love and charity.

Contrary to the wishes of Mrs Vivian, the two domestics who had resided so many years with Mr Willoughby, left the house at his death and removed into one of the northern shires. As these people had always shown great attachment to her, she was much surprised at their determination. No mention was made of them in the will; but deeming their services deserving a recompense, she presented them with a handsome sum ere she suffered them to depart.

Gertrude now filled up her establishment from her husband's parishioners; and strange it may appear, amongst these was Susan Dawson, the daughter of her bitter foe. The girl had become attached to Mrs Vivian from having been a pupil in the village school at which that lady presided, and she now begged permission to become an under-servant in her nursery. Gertrude was too generous to permit the misconduct of the mother to affect her treatment of the daughter. She, moreover, saw that to remove her from the contaminating influence of evil example would probably be to save her from ruin, and she therefore acceded to her request without hesitation.

Another seven years elapsed with little change, excepting that Mr Vivian's family increased in number, and if possible, enjoyed an increase of happiness. A fresh vicissitude however, now took place in Gertrude's eventful life. Great events spring from apparently trifling causes, and we must here enter into the detail of some seemingly insignificant matters, in order to proceed with our story.

Some relatives of Mr Vivian who had been abroad for several years, wrote to intimate an intention to visit him *en route* on their return to their residence in England. As this family consisted of the master and mistress, servants and children much preparation was necessary for their accommodation. Mrs Vivian, therefore proposed that some chambers, which had not been made use of since the death of her uncle, should be comfortably furnished for the reception of her own domestics, and that they should give up their apartments to the strangers. This proposition met with general approval, with but one exception, and that was to the room which had been occupied by Molly Hawkins. A superstitious dread of they knew not what made the ignorant people shrink from the thought of sleeping in a chamber which she had tenanted. Susan Dawson, who was superior to these fears, volunteered, however, to become the occupant. The old woman was her grandmother, and perhaps she was a little indignant at the odium cast upon her character. The servants were loud in their opposition to what they termed her folly. They were sure, they said, some evil would happen to her; and, by a singular coincidence, the girl had not occupied the chamber many nights, ere she was taken suddenly and seriously ill. The cause did not certainly originate in the apartment, or anything connected with it, but no reasoning could persuade the superstitious people out of their preconceived opinions on the subject.

Judith, bad as she was, was not wholly without natural affection; and hearing that her child was lying ill at the Hall, she broke a vow she had made, never to enter a house, in which Mrs Vivian was mistress, and even solicited permission to attend her daughter in the capacity of nurse. Gertrude could not refuse so reasonable a request, though it was far from agreeable to her to have a person of Judith Dawson's habits as an inmate of her quiet dwelling.

The crisis of Susan's malady proved favorable; but as she was for some weeks in a state of extreme weakness, and unable to leave her chamber, her mother still continued to attend her. Judith was one day reaching down a book from a closet, in compliance with the request of the invalid, when her hand uncon-

sciously touched a secret opening, which disclosed a small aperture in the wall, wherein something lay concealed; she seized on it with the eagerness of a vulture lighting on unexpected prey.

'Cannot you find the book, mother?' asked the sick girl, drawing aside the curtain as she spoke. The almost fiendish expression which sat upon the countenance of her parent terrified her. 'What is the matter?' she demanded scarcely knowing whether to believe she was in a state of insanity or not.

'Nothing—nothing,' was the woman's reply; and she strove to conceal the parchment, for such it was, which she had purloined, in her apron.

'Mother, you have taken something from that closet, whatever it may be, it is neither yours nor mine. I entreat of you to restore it to its place.'

Judith answered by a burst of wild laughter. Finding all attempts at concealment vain, she resolved to terrify her daughter into silence. 'I have found that which will show who is mistress of this mansion,' she exultingly said, holding up the scroll to Susan's view; 'but I charge you to speak of it at your peril. Mrs Vivian will learn her downfall soon enough.'

The menacing words which fell from the lips of her parent, the horrible gestures which accompanied them, and a presentiment that some evil was impending, operated so powerfully upon the sick girl, that she sunk back on her pillow in a state of insensibility. A relapse of the disorder was the result. But though her life was in imminent danger, Judith did not scruple to leave her, and set out that very night on a journey to London, that she might have legal advice on the matter which was uppermost in her thoughts.

Dread of her mother's resentment, and disinclination to expose her faults, induced Susan to regard her injunction to silence; but the concealment preyed on her mind, and affected her feeble frame already to such a degree, that though the malady was subdued, it was apprehended that she would sink into a decline. Susan's fondness for the children, and her general good conduct, had much endeared her to her mistress, and Mrs Vivian proposed visiting an adjacent watering place, for the sole purpose of affording her the benefit of change of air and sea-bathing. The family were on the eve of departure, when apprised, through the medium of a man of law, that proceedings would forthwith be commenced against Gertrude Vivian for the unlawful possession of certain property, which could be proved to belong to one Judith Dawson, in right of her mother Mary Hawkins, whom he affirmed to have been the lawful heiress to the said property.

[To be Continued.]

## A SHERWD REPLY.

A young friend of ours was undergoing an examination for admission to the bar. Judge S— had pushed his questions pretty closely, but the candidate was never at fault. Finally, the Judge pounced upon him as follows: 'Suppose that a Boston importer should come to you with a case like this:—and then the Judge went on to state one of the most complicated questions that arise in regard to marine insurance. It was a poser. Our friend, intending to practice in the country, was not 'posted up' on this topic. But he was a Yankee, and he never was at a loss for an answer. So soon as the Judge had summed up his case and closed off with the inquiry, 'What would you say?' our friend promptly replied, 'I should tell him to sit down, Sir, until I could look at my books.' 'The best thing you could do—the very thing you ought to do,' rejoined the Judge; 'you are admitted, Sir.'

## EXCUSE FOR SMOKING.

In the reign of James I., of tobacco having notoriety, the boys of a school acquired the habit of smoking, and indulged it night and day, using the most ingenious expedients to conceal the vice from their master; till one luckless evening, when the imps huddled together round the fire of their dormitory, involving each other in vapors of their own creating, lo! in burst the master and stood in awful dignity before them.

'How, now,' said the dominie to the first lad: 'how dare you be smoking tobacco?'

'Sir,' said the boy, 'I am subject to head aches, and a pipe takes off the pain.'

'And you? and you? and you?' inquired the pedagogue, questioning every boy in his turn.

One had a 'raging tooth;' another a cholic; the third a cough; in short, they all had something.

'Now Sirrah,' bellowed the doctor to the last boy, 'what disorder do you smoke for?'

Alas! all the excuses were exhausted; but the interrogated urchin, putting down his pipe after a farewell whiff, and looking up in his master's face, said in a winning hypocritical tone, 'Sir, I smoke for corns!'

CONFESSION.—Be not ashamed to confess that you have been in the wrong. It is but owing what you need not be ashamed of, that you now have more sense than you had before to see your error; more humility to acknowledge it; and more grace to correct it.

'Bill,' said Tom Williams, 'what desperate cold weather we have! Why they have got a Mahomet down to 'Squire Jones's, that tells how cold it is, and this morning it was five degrees colder than nothing.'