

THE ECCENTRICITIES OF TESTATORS.

A hundred years ago, English lawyers, when dining together, used to drink to the health of "the schoolmaster," for schoolmasters at that period often made wills for their friends, and by their ignorance of legal technicalities gave the legal profession a considerable amount of remunerative business. At a later date, a regular toast was "to our best friend—the man who makes his own will." Prosaic as most last wills and testaments are—except to fortunate legatees—there are many amusing instances of eccentric bequests and curious disposals of property.

Curious Requests.

Some years since, a Mr. Sanborn desired that in death, as in life, his body should proclaim the glory of the republic. He left five thousand dollars to the late Professor Agassiz, in return for which he was, by a scientific process, set forth in the will, to tan his—the testator's—skin into leather, and from it have a drum made. Two of the most suitable bones of his body were to be made into drumsticks, and with these a Mr. Warren Simpson—to whom Mr. Sanborn left the bulk of his property—was "on every seventeenth of June to repair to the foot of Bunker Hill, and at sunrise, beat on the drum, the parchment of which had been made out of the testator's skin, the stirring strains of 'Yankee Doodle.'"

A somewhat similar bequest was made by a German gentleman in 1887. The difference, however, consists in the fact that no annual commemoration of the deceased was required. The testator died at Pittsburg, and by his will directed that his body should be cremated and the ashes forwarded to the German consul at New York, who was to hand them over to the captain of the steamship "Elbe." When in mid-Atlantic the captain was to request a passenger to dress himself in nautical costume, and, ascending with the funeral urn to the top-mast, to scatter the ashes to the four winds of Heaven. These strange directions were faithfully carried out. Quite as curious were the directions for the funeral of an Englishman named John Underwood. He willed that he was to be buried in a green coffin with a copy of Horace under his feet, one of Milton under his head, a Greek Testament in his right hand, and a small Horace in his left. Six friends, who were not to wear black clothes, were to follow him to the grave, and there to sing a verse of the twentieth ode of the second book of Horace. After this they were to "take a cheerful glass and think no more of John Underwood."

Bequests Upon Matrimonial Conditions.

Wills may also be admitted as evidence

of the mixed blessings of the matrimonial state. An English nobleman said in his will: "I give and bequeath to the worst of women, whom I unfortunately married, forty-five brass half-pence, which will buy her a pullet for supper." A physician, in Scotland, dying some twelve years ago, left the whole of his estate to his two sisters; and then came the following extraordinary clause: "To my wife, as a recompense for deserting me and leaving me in peace, I expect the said sister Elizabeth to make her a gift of ten shillings sterling, to buy her a pocket handkerchief to weep on after my decease." Another resident in Scotland bequeathed to his wife the sum of sixty thousand pounds, "on condition that she undertakes to pass two hours a day at my graveside, for the ten years following my decease, in company with her sister, whom I have reason to know she loathes worse than she does me." Another husband, an Englishman, this time, stated that he would have left his widow ten thousand pounds, had she allowed him to read his evening newspaper in peace; but as she always commenced playing and singing when he started to read, he left her only one thousand pounds. One other case of this kind is worthy of note. A husband left his wife twelve thousand pounds, to be increased to twenty-four thousand pounds provided she wore a widow's cap after his death. She accepted the larger amount, wore the cap for six months, and then put it off. A law suit followed; but the court held that the testator should have inserted the word "always," and gave judgment for the widow, who, the following day, re-entered the state of matrimony. Thus, the husband's plan for preventing his widow marrying again failed.

Malevolent Stipulations

The malevolence of some men is manifested in their death, as well as during their lifetime. It is difficult to conceive anything more cruel than a father who left his daughter thirty thousand pounds under the following conditions: "Should my daughter marry, and be afflicted with children, the trustees are to pay out of the said legacy two thousand pounds, on the birth of the first child, to the——hospital; four thousand on the birth of the second; six thousand on the birth of the third; and an additional two thousand pounds on the birth of each subsequent child, till the thirty thousand pounds is exhausted. Should any portion of this sum be left at the end of twenty years, the balance is to be paid to her, to use as she thinks fit."

A certain Henry Budd died in 1862, leaving considerable property. It was to be divided equally among his sons, and held by them as long as they wore no moustaches. Should one of them cease to shave his upper lip, his share

would be forfeited. This condition is simplicity itself compared with that laid down by an inhabitant of the English town of Derby. He left all his possessions to his eldest son, with the proviso that he must never use tobacco in any shape or form. If he broke this regulation, the property was to be divided between his six brothers and sisters.

A few years ago a Russian gentleman living at Odessa left four million roubles (one rouble is worth about seventy cents) to his four nieces, but they were to receive the money only after having worked for a year as washerwomen, house-maids or farm servants. The conditions were carried out, and while occupying these positions they are said to have received many offers of marriage.

Gifts to Animals.

Kindness to animals seems to be quite common among testators, and hundreds of people have left considerable sums for the comfort of their pets. A certain spinster named Charlotte Rosa Raine bequeathed her "dear old white puss Titiens and pusses tabby Rolla, tabby Jennifee and black and white Ursula to Ann Elizabeth Matthews," directing her executors to pay her twelve pounds a year for the maintenance of each cat, so long as it should live. Her long-haired white puss Louise, and her black and white puss Doctor Clausman, she gave to her housemaid, Elizabeth Willoughby, and her black ebony and white Oscar to Lavina Beck; and her executors were directed to pay these persons twelve pounds per annum for the maintenance of each cat. The remainder of her cats—how many Miss Raine had, is not recorded—she left to the aforesaid Ann Elizabeth Matthews, "to whom one hundred and fifty pounds per annum shall be paid for their maintenance as long as any do live, but such annuity does not apply to kittens born of them."

Another eccentric old lady left a few trifling amounts to her relatives, but five hundred pounds a year to be held in trust for her parrot, with five hundred pounds for a new cage for the bird. Yet another lady left a hundred pounds a year for the maintenance of her parrot which was to be produced twice a year, "to prove that the person tending it had not wrung its neck."

As far as I have been able to ascertain such eccentricities as the above are much more common in Europe than in this country. An English maiden lady, who was by no means insane, left seventy pounds a year for the maintenance of three goldfish, which were to be identified in the following manner: "One is bigger than the other two, and these latter are to be easily recognized, as one is fat and the other lean. If the fish, on quarter-day, are found to be of this description, the money is to be paid; if