

EDITOR'S DRAWER

A WILL AND A WAY.

BY MARGARET SUTTON BRISCOE.

IT was in that pleasant season of the year when there is a ladder at every apple-tree, and every man met on the road is driving with his left hand and eating a red apple from his right. At this season, as regularly as the year rolled round, old Carshena Hubblestone nearly died of cramps, caused by gorging himself with apples that fell almost into his mouth from the spreading boughs of fruit trees that fairly roofed his low-built house. This was, as it were, Carshena's one dissipation. The apples cost him nothing, and his medical attention after his bouts cost him nothing either, for he was the son of a physician, and though his father was long since dead, the village doctor would not render a bill.

"Crow don't eat crow," Dr. Michel answered, roughly, when Carshena weakly asked him what he owed. The chance of thus roistering so cheaply is not presented to every man, and reluctance to let such a bargain pass was perhaps what helped to lend periodicity to the old man's attacks. Dr. Michel always held that this was his chief incentive, and, be this as it might, it was very certain that apples and bargains were the only two things on earth for which Carshena was ever known to show a weakness, creditable or discreditable. Most small communities have their rich men and their mean men, but in the village of Leonard the two were one.

As the years passed on and Carshena's head whitened, it naturally grew to be a less and less easy task for Dr. Michel to bring his patient back to the place where he had been before apples ripened. If the situation had not tickled a spice of humor that lay under the physician's grim exterior he would have refused these autumnal attentions. As it was he confined himself to futile warnings and threats of non-attendance, but he always did obey the summons when it came. The townsfolk of Leonard would all have taken the same humorous view of this weakness of Carshena's but for the trouble which it gave his too-good sister Adelia—liked and pitied by every one. Adelia nursed her brother in each attack with a tenderness and anxiety that aggravated all the community. Nobody but his sister Adelia was ever anxious over Carshena. It was therefore like a bolt from a clear sky when, in this chronicled autumn, the following conversation took place at the Hubblestones' gate. Dr. Michel's buggy was wheeling out to the main road as Mr. Gowan, the town butcher, was about to drive through the gateway.

"Well, doctor," called the genial man of blood, a broad grin on his round face, "how's the patient?"

"He's gone, sir," said Dr. Michel, drawing rein. The butcher drew up his horse sharply, his ruddy face changing so suddenly that the doctor laughed outright.

"Gone!" echoed Mr. Gowan. "Not gone?"

"Yes, sir, as I warned him time and again he would go."

The butcher shook his head and pursed his lips, the news slowly penetrating his mind. "Well, I certainly would hate to die of eatin' apples," he said at last.

"I guess you'll find you hate to die of anything, when the time comes," said the more experienced physician. "Carshena," he added, "got nothing he didn't bring on himself, if that's any comfort to him."

"Don't speak hard of the dead, doctor," he urged. "We've all got to follow him some day. He wasn't a nice man in some ways, Carshena wasn't, but—"

"He was a nasty old man in most ways," snapped the doctor.

"Don't say such things now, doctor, don't," urged his companion. "'Ain't he paid in his full price, whatever his sins was? Poor soul! he can't be worse 'n dead."

"Oh yes, he can, and for one I believe he is," interrupted the doctor. His crisp white hair seemed to Mr. Gowan to curl tighter over his head as he frowned with some thought he was nursing. "You haven't seen the will I had to witness this morning!" he burst out. "Just you wait a little! Upon my soul! the more I think of it the madder I get! It's out of my bailiwick, but if I were a lawyer I'd walk right up now under those old apple-trees yonder, and before that man was cold on his bed I'd have his sister's promise to break his old will into a thousand splinters! Wait till you hear it. Good-morning."

When the will was read and its contents announced, the town of Leonard, including its butcher, took the doctor's view to a man.

"A brute," said Dr. Michel, hotly, "who has let his old sister work her hands to the bone for him, and then turned her off like some old worn-out horse, has, in my opinion, no right to a will at all. How about setting this will aside in his sister's interests, judge?"

A little convocation of the leading spirits of Leonard were met together in Dr. Michel's office to discuss the matter of Carshena's will, and what should be done with Adelia, cast on

the charity of the village. Judge Bowles, when appealed to, raised his mild blue eyes and looked around the company.

"Adelia," he said, "is the best sister I ever knew. Had the man no shame?"

"Shame!" said the town's barber, with a reminiscent chuckle; "why, he came into my parlors one day and asked me if I'd cut the back of his hair for twelve cents, and let him cut the front himself; and I did it, for the joke of the thing! He saved thirteen cents that way."

"Gentlemen, gentlemen!" demurred the judge; but amid the general laughter the tax-gatherer's voice rose:

"There isn't a tax he didn't fight. This town got nothing out of Carshena Hubblestone that he could help paying; and now he leaves us his relatives to support."

Judge Bowles rose to his feet.

"Gentlemen," he said, in mild but earnest rebuke, "the man is dead. We all know what his character was without these distressing particulars. It is entirely true that we owe him nothing, but a dead man is defenceless, and his will is his will, and law is law. Did you ever think what a solemn title a man's last will is? It means just what it says, gentlemen—his last will, his last wish and power of disposition writ down on paper, concerning his own property. It's a solemn thing to break that."

"A man's no business having such a will and a disposition to write down on paper," said the doctor. "What were the exact terms of the will, judge?"

"Very simple," said Judge Bowles, dryly. "The whole estate is to be sold, and the entire proceeds, every cent realized, except what is kept back for repairs and care, is to be applied to the purchase of a suitable lot and the raising of a great monument over the mortal remains of Carshena Hubblestone."

"While his sister starves!" added Dr. Michel.

"Gee!" exclaimed the kindly butcher. He had heard all this before, but thus repeated it seemed to strike him anew, as somehow it did all the rest of the company. They sat looking at each other in silence, with indrawings of the breath and compression of lips.

"There is this extenuating circumstance," said the doctor, with dangerous smoothness: "our lamented brother was aware that unless he erected a monument to himself he might never enjoy one. We—the judge, Mr. Gowan, and myself—are made sole executors under the will—without pay. In Carshena's life Adelia was his white slave. In his death, doubtless, he felt he could trust her to make no protest. I wish you could have seen her with him as I have, gentlemen. I shall call it a shame upon us if we let her eat the bitter bread of our charity. She's been put upon and trodden down, but she's still a proud woman in her way, and we've got to save her from a bitter old age. We've got to do it."

"It's the kind of thing that discourages one's belief in humanity," said the judge, in a lowered tone. "This affair might be only absurd if it weren't for the sister's share in it. As it is, it's a revelation of human selfishness that makes one heart-sick."

Dr. Michel's laugh rang out irreverently.

"It's perfectly absurd, sister or no sister," he said. "Nobody, not one of us, loved Carshena in life—though I think now we didn't hate him half enough—and here in death he's fixed it so the town's got to pay for his responsibilities while his money builds him a grand monument! I call that about as absurd as you'll get anywhere. I'll grant you it makes me downright sick at my stomach, judge, but it don't touch my heart. No, sir. Keep your organs separate, as I do, gentlemen. There's one thing certain"—he drew the eyes of his audience with uplifted finger—"if we can't outwit this will somehow, we'll be the laughing-stock of this whole county. I don't care a snap of my finger if Carshena has a monument as high as Haman's gallows, if only his sister is protected at the same time."

"Well, short of breaking the will, what would you suggest, doctor?" asked Judge Bowles, with a little stiffness. He had not liked the familiar discourse on his organs, but the doctor did not care. The judge was ruffled at last, which was exactly what he desired.

"Suggest?" he cried, laughing. "I don't know; but I know there never was a will written that couldn't be driven through with a coach and six if the right man sits on the box. You're the lawyer, judge."

The judge was a lawyer, as he then and there proceeded to prove. He rose to his feet and spoke in his old-fashioned style:

"Gentlemen, I think I speak for this company when I say that we strongly object to the breaking of this will as a bad precedent in the community. We wish it carried out to the very letter. Our fellow-townsmen knew his sister's needs better than we, and he chose to leave her needy. There are many, many things this town sorely wants, as he also knew, but he chose to use his money otherwise. What a monument to him it would have been had he built us the new school-house our town requires! The wet south lot down by the old mill is an eyesore to the village. Had he used that land and drained it and set up a school-house there, or indeed any public building, what a different meeting this would have been! He was our only man of wealth, and he leaves not so much as a town clock to thank him for. No; a monument to *himself* is what his will calls for, and a monument he shall have. If we failed him here, which of us would feel sure that our own wills would be carried out? In the confidence of these four walls we can say that the difficulties of the inscription and the style of monument seem insuperable. I know but one man to whom I would intrust this delicate commis-

sion. I feel confident that he would not render us too absurd by too conspicuous a monument or too florid an inscription. Need I name Dr. Michel?"

"Out of my bailiwick," cried the doctor—"way out of my bailiwick." But his voice was drowned in the confusion of the popular acclaim that was forming him into a committee of one. The kindly butcher made his way to the doctor's side under cover of the noise.

"Take it, doctor; now do take it," he whispered in his ear. "There ain't a man in the town that can shave this pig if you can't. I was sayin' just yesterday you're lost in this little place of ourn. You've got more sense than's often called for here. Here's the chance for you to show 'em what you can do. Do take it."

The physician looked at the wheedling little butcher with a glance from his blue eye that was half kindly, half irritated. "Well, I'll take it," he cried; "I'll take it; and I thank you for your confidence, gentlemen."

It was a full month before the little company met again in the doctor's office, but during that period they knew Dr. Michel had not been idle in the matter intrusted to his care. He was seen in close conversation with the town's first masons, the best carpenters, the local architect, and these worthies, under close and eager examination, gave answers that dashed the unspoken hopes of those who questioned. Here were *bona fide* bids asked for on so much masonry, so much carpentering, and the architect had been ordered to send in designs of monuments, how high he deemed it unprofessional to state; but arguing inversely, they judged by the length of his countenance that the measurements were not short—he had particularly hated Carshena. It was, for all these reasons, a rather anxious-looking company that met in Dr. Michel's office at his summons, and the doctor's own face was not reassuring as he opened the meeting.

"Well, gentlemen," he said, slowly, "it's a thankless task you've given me, but such as it is, I hope you will find I have performed it to your satisfaction. Here are various plans for the monument to be erected to our late fellow-citizen, and here is a plan of the ground that it has seemed to me most suitable to purchase. It has been a task peculiarly uncongenial to me, because I, I suppose, know more than any of you here how this money is needed where it ought to have gone. I saw Adelia yesterday, and lonely and ghost-ridden as that old house would be to any of us, it's a home to her that's to be sold over her head to build this." He laid his hand on the papers he had thrown down on the table before him. The little company looked silently at each other, with faces as downcast as if they were to blame. It was Judge Bowles who spoke first.

"Gentlemen," he said, "we must not let ourselves feel too responsible in this matter. We are only following our plain duty. Show us the monument which you consider best, doctor."

The doctor was silently turning over the papers. "Family feeling is a queer thing," he said, meditatively. "I saw Adelia the other day, and I asked her if she wanted a neighbor to sleep in the house at night.

"There's nothing here for robbers to take, Dr. Michel," she said; 'and if it's ghosts you think I'm afraid of, I only wish from my heart ghosts would come back to visit me. Everybody of my blood is dead.'"

"It's very pitiful," said Judge Bowles, slowly.

The doctor turned on him instantly. "Do you seem to feel now that you could countenance breaking the will, judge?"

"No," said the judge, shortly, as one who whistles to keep his courage up.

The doctor's fingers drummed on the table as he paused thoughtfully.

"Carshena," he said, "if you can believe me, measured out the kerosene oil he allowed for each week on Monday; and when it gave out they went to bed at dusk, if it gave out on Friday night. But one thing Adelia did manage to do. So long as a drop of oil was in the measure a light stood in a window that lit up the ugly turn in the county road round the corner of their house. I know her light saved me from a bad collision once; some of you also, perhaps. She's kept that little lamp so clean it always shone like a jewel up there. The window-pane it shone through had never a speck on it either. That's what I call public spirit. And it's public spirit, too, that makes her keep sweet-smelling flowers growing on the top of the old road wall. In summer I always drive past there slowly to enjoy them. When she comes on the charity of the town she may console herself by remembering these things. She did what she could (in spite of Carshena), and nobody can do more. Here are the plans for his monument, gentlemen. I would like to have your vote on them."

The little company, as if glad to move, drew about the table as the doctor opened out the plans in a row. The butcher, whose ruddy face looked dim in his disappointment, and whose despondent chin hung down on his white shirt bosom, picked up one of the designs gingerly and examined it.

"Are they all alike, doctor?" he asked.

Judge Bowles looked over Mr. Gowan's shoulder.

"Each design seems to be a hollow shaft of some kind, with a round opening at the top," he said, and looked inquiringly over his glasses at the doctor, who nodded assent.

"They are all hollow. You seem to get more for your money so. The round opening at the top of the shaft can be filled with anything we may choose later. I might suggest a crystal with the virtues of the deceased inscribed on it. Then, if we keep a light burning behind the glass at night, those virtues will shine before us by night and by day."

Judge Bowles lifted his eyes quickly. The

doctor's face was unpleasantly satiric, and his blue eyes looked out angrily from under his curling white hair. Judge Bowles sat down, leaning back heavily in his chair, his perplexed eyes still on Dr. Michel's frowning brow. Mr. Gowan, with a look as near anger as he could achieve, moved to a seat behind the stove. His idol was failing him utterly. He felt he himself could have done better than this. Dr. Michel's roving eyes glanced round the circle of dissatisfied and dismayed faces, and then for the first time he seemed to break from his indifference:

"This is all very well, gentlemen—very well indeed. The facts are, you gave me a commission, and bound me to fulfil it strictly and to the letter, and now you are dissatisfied because I have followed your wishes. What did you expect? If you had left the matter to me without restrictions, I should certainly have tried to break the will, as I told you. Briefly, here is my report. We shall have about twenty thousand dollars all told to invest in a monument over our lamented brother. Any one of these hollow masonry structures here will cost about ten thousand dollars. As to the purchase of a suitable lot, which the will directs, I think even Carshena would declare it a good bargain to pay nothing whatever for the land, and that I can arrange, I believe. I have good reason to suppose"—he began to speak very slowly—"that the town would, without price, allow us to erect this monument on that unsightly bit of wet land to the south, near the old mill, if we in turn will agree to drain the grounds, keep them in good order, plant flowers and shrubbery, and further promise to keep a light burning all night in an opening at the top of the monument. I spoke of a crystal set in that opening, with the virtues of the deceased inscribed upon it, but we can, if we choose, carve those same virtues in the more imperishable stone below, and print something else—a clock face perhaps—on the crystal above. That's a mere minor detail."

Judge Bowles, whose gaze had been growing more and more bewildered, now started in his chair and sat suddenly upright. He stared at the doctor uncertainly. The doctor cast a quick look at him, and went on rapidly:

"If you will allow me, I'll make my report quickly, and leave it with you. I have a great deal to do this morning in other directions. It has occurred to me that as the base of the monument is to be square and hollow, it would be easy to fit it into a comfortable living-room, with one, or perhaps two, small rooms built about it. I have not mentioned this to the architect, but I know it can be done. The will especially directs that repairs and care be allowed for." The doctor was talking rapidly now. "The monument will not cost more than ten thousand, the clock about two. Twelve thousand from twenty thousand leaves eight thousand. The yearly interest on eight thousand and the fact that

we could offer free residence in the monument should let us engage a reliable resident keeper, who would give the time and attention that such a monument and such a park would need."

The doctor paused, and again looked about him.

The whole circle of faces looked back at him curiously—some with a puzzled gaze, but several, including Judge Bowles, with a half-fascinated, half-dismayed air. Mr. Gowan alone preserved his look of utter hopelessness.

"Who'd take a job like that?" he said, gloomily. "I wouldn't, for one, live in a vault with Carshena, dead or alive."

"Oh, the grave could be outside, and the monument as a kind of monster head-stone," said the Doctor, pleasantly. "My idea was to have the grave well outside. Four or five hundred and a home isn't much to offer a man, gentlemen, but I happen to know a very respectable elderly woman who would, it seems to me, suit us exactly as well as a man. In fact I think it would considerably add to the picturesque features of our little town park to have a resident female keeper. I think I see her now, sitting in the summer sunshine at the door of this unique head-stone monument, or in winter independently luxuriating in its warm and hospitable shelter. I see her winding the clock, affectionately keeping the grave like a gorgeous flower-bed, caring for the shrubbery, burnishing the clock lamp till it shines like a jewel, as she well knows how to do, and best of all in her case, gentlemen, I happen to know from her own lips that she has no fear of ghosts. Why, gentlemen, what's the matter? I protest, gentlemen."

At that moment Mr. Gowan might be said to be the doctor's only audience. The rest of the company were engaged in whispering to each other, or speechlessly giving themselves over to suppressed and unholy glee. Judge Bowles was openly wiping his eyes and shaking in his chair. Dr. Michel looked around the circle with resentful surprise.

"You seem amused, gentlemen!" he said, with dignity; and then addressing himself to Mr. Gowan exclusively, as if that gentleman alone were worthy to be his listener, "Would you object to a woman as keeper, Mr. Gowan?"

"What's her name?" asked the butcher.

A roar of laughter, not to be longer suppressed, drowned his words. Mr. Gowan looked about the shaken circle, stared for a moment, then suddenly, as comprehension, like a breaking dawn, spread over his round face, he brought his hand down hard on his fat knee.

"Well, doctor," he roared, in admiration too deep for laughter, "if you ain't the dawgornest!"

The doctor's wiry hair seemed to rise and spread as wings, his eyes snapped and twinkled, his mouth puckered. "Will some one



"THEY ARE ALL HOLLOW."

embody this in the form of a motion?" he asked, gravely. The judge dried his eyes, and, with difficulty, rose to his feet.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I move that we build this monument with a base large enough for a suite of rooms inside; that we set this structure on the lot which our good doctor has chosen; that we ornament it with an illuminated clock at the top; and further, that—that this female keeper be appointed."

"Seconded, by Harry!" roared Mr. Gowan.

The doctor, with his hands on his hips, his body thrown far back, looked with the eye of a conqueror over the assembly. "Those in favor of the motion will please say Aye; those opposed, No. It seems to be carried; it is carried," he recited in one rapid breath.

"Amen!" endorsed Mr. Gowan, fervently.

And this warm approval of their butcher was in the end echoed as cordially by the most pious citizens of Leonard. After the first shock of their surprise was over, natural misgivings were lost in enjoyment of the grim humor of this very practical jest of their good doctor's, that visitors now actually stop over a train to see. Many a village has its park, and many a one its illuminated clock; it was

left for Leonard to have in its park a grave kept like a gorgeous flower-bed, and at the grave's head a towering monument that is at once a tombstone, an illuminated clock, and a residence.

Who the next keeper may be it is one of the amusements of Leonard to imagine. The present keeper is a happy old woman, whose fellow-citizens like nothing better than to see her winding the clock, caring for the flowers, burnishing the town lamp; in summer sitting in the sunshine at the door of the head-stone monument, in winter luxuriating in that warm and independent shelter.

"I feel as if Carshena knew just what was best for me, after all, doctor," she said to her physician, in his first call upon her in her new home; and that worthy, with a nod of his white head, assented in the readiest manner.

"Doubtless, madam, doubtless," he said, "Carshena had all this in his mind when he made me his executor. Didn't you, Carshena?" He winked his eye genially at the grave as he passed out, and with no shade of uncertainty or repentance in his mind, climbed into his buggy and went on his satisfied way.