

A Romance of the Piccadilly Tube

By T. G. Jackson

Old Mr. Markham lay dying in an upper room of a fine mansion in a great London square. The house was plunged in that oppressive stillness which reigns when sickness is there and death is near. Footsteps were stealthy, and voices subdued, and the ticking of the clock was audible in the silent room. By the bedside of the old man was Mr. Harvey, Iris confidential solicitor and old friend, come to attend the execution of the sick man's last will and testament.

"You are quite resolved then," said Mr. Harvey, "to dispose of your property thus? I have drawn the will exactly to your instructions, but as an old friend of you and your sons, you will forgive my putting this question again for the last time."

"Yes," said a feeble voice, "that's what I mean."

"You cut off your elder son, George, with a thousand pounds, all leave all the rest, except some minor legacies, to James. The old will, you remember, left them equal shares."

"Yes, yes," said the old man peevishly, "I have paid George's debts over and over again till I am sick of it, and what I might give him now would only go the way of the rest. He has a little money of his own from his mother, if he hasn't spent it, and he must make that do. James is a careful lad and the estate will fare better in his hands."

"Well, I have no right to say more, though I'm sorry. But of course, you must do what you please with your own."

The old man was propped up in his bed, a pen was put into his feeble fingers, a servant was called in as a second witness, the deed was duly signed and attested, and Mr. Harvey took it away with him.

The two sons were waiting in the dining-room. They had finished a late luncheon and were standing by the fire. They knew of Mr. Harvey's visit, and guessed its purpose, and various thoughts were passing through their minds. George indeed did not trouble himself much about the will. In his careless way, he thought things would be all right, and he need not worry himself about them beforehand. He was concerned for his father, whom he really loved, though he knew how often he had plagued and offended him, almost beyond forgiveness. James, on the contrary, being of a cooler and more calculating temper, could not help wondering what was meant by a new will, and an altered disposition of the property. The estate was a large one, with lands in the country, beside the house in town, and large sums in the funds, and he wondered how his interests would be affected by what was going on upstairs.

The door opened and Mr. Harvey came in to bid them good-bye. He had known them since they were boys, and had a regard for both of them, though in his secret heart he preferred the scapegrace George to his more careful brother.

"Well, sir," said George advancing to meet him, "how did you leave my father? I am sorry to say the doctor gives us little hope. Do you think he would like to see me?"

"I doubt it, George; you must ask the doctor or the nurse. He is very feeble."

"Was he able to attend to the business you came about?" asked James.

Mr. Harvey thought the question rather ill-timed and unfeeling, and answered a little curtly, that there had been no difficulty. He then took leave of them. George accompanied him to the door, and as they were parting, Mr. Harvey putting his hand on his arm, said:

"Tell me, George. have you any debts?"

“Not a penny,” said he radiantly, “my dear old father paid them all off last week before he fell ill. It was awfully good of him. I know I have behaved badly, and did not deserve it from him.”

“Well, George,” said Mr. Harvey, “let me give you a hint. There must be no more debts in future. You will have to be careful. I speak seriously for your good. Farewell, and don’t forget what I say.”

Left to himself, George wondered what was meant by this hint, connected, he supposed, with the new will, if indeed a new will had really been executed, as he and his brother believed. Mr. Harvey’s words seemed to convey a friendly warning that things had not been going favourably for him upstairs. He had always understood that he and his brother were to share equally in the estate; was this arrangement now to be disturbed? That would be awkward, for he had only small means of his own, and his way of living had always been after an opulent fashion.

“Hang it all,” he said, “it will be deuced hard on me, if James gets more than his share. After all, I’m the eldest son, and he has no right to cut me out.”

Like the two sons of the Patriarch, the two Markhams differed entirely in character and pursuits; but in the modern case, the parental preference had been reversed, for it was the mother who had loved the Esau of the family best, and the father who favoured the Jacob. George Markham was lively and adventurous, a lover of pleasure and selfish and self-indulgent in its pursuit; but he had a kindly and generous vein in his composition which in the view of his friends went far towards compensating his faults. James was of a cautious and calculating nature, who did everything with deliberation, looking carefully after his own interests, and fencing himself round with precautions. He was married, and had children, and a business in the City which was doing well. Since his mother’s death, George’s influence in the family steadily declined: Esau sank into disfavour and the star of Jacob ascended; till at last, as we have seen, their father resolved that by leaving George free of debt and with a thousand pounds in his pocket, he might wash his hands of further responsibility for him.

In this perturbed state of mind, after parting with Mr. Harvey, George avoided rejoining his brother, and taking his hat, sallied forth to go to his chambers in the Temple. The justification for these chambers was a shallow pretence he made of reading for the Bar, though beyond eating his dinners he did little else to qualify himself for a forensic career. However, it served as a pretext for establishing himself in bachelor’s quarters, which was convenient for his way of living, and his father had long given up in despair any inquiry after his legal studies.

It was growing dusk as he descended to a station of the Piccadilly tube. There was the congestion of would-be passengers usual at eventide when offices close and myriads of clerks and servants flock from the centre of London to the outskirts. Trains arrived crammed to suffocation, not a seat vacant, passages choked with strapholders, and entrance lobby solid with perspiring humanity. When the carriage doors were opened to discharge a few travellers, the mob surged desperately to force an entrance, half of them to be disappointed, and condemned to wait for another train, where they might be more fortunate. George was near one end of the platform where the crowd was a little less compact, though even there he had hardly room to move. A train was heard approaching and every head was turned in that direction. At that moment a gentleman in front of him dropped something, and stooped to recover it, though the crowd allowed him little room for movement. George saw it at his feet: it was a paper folded lengthways and lay more within his reach than that of the owner. “Let me get it for you, sir,” he said, and stooped to pick it up and restore it. The roar of the train sounded close at hand; the crowd pressed on the stooping figures, as they rose together they were pushed violently against one another; the other man was close to the edge of the platform, and to his horror, George saw him

lose his balance and fall over the edge. As he fell, George caught sight of his face; it was his old friend, Mr. Harvey. The train was upon him in a moment.

There was a shriek from the crowd, first a recoil and then a rush of agonised spectators; George was swept back to the far side of the platform and stood leaning against the wall, trembling and sick with horror. Officials arrived, the train was moved, and men went down on the line upon their ghastly errand. He could not bear to wait and see the recovery of the body, or witness the frightful details of the accident. Shaking in every limb, he found his way to the exit, half unconsciously; the lift was remote and news of the accident had not reached the attendant when George took his place, and there was no delay. As he reached the surface, he noticed that he had in his hand the fatal paper which had occasioned the disaster. It was too dark to see the address, and he put it in his pocket. It had belonged, he supposed, to his poor friend, and on the morrow he would forward it to the address it bore. It did not matter now, his only aim for the moment was to get to his quarters and try to recover his nerve. He called a cab and drove to the Temple.

Arrived at his rooms, he sank into an armchair and covered his face with his hands. The whole dreadful scene passed before him in imagination; the crush, the collision, the reeling back of his poor friend, the glimpse of his face and of the grey hair as his hat fell off, and then the train came upon him. It made him sick to think of it. By and by, as the first horror of the scene passed and left room for calmer reflection, he thought less of the accident, and more of the man. Harvey had long been his father's friend and adviser; he had always been kind to himself as a boy, and had often stood his friend when he had need of an advocate with his father. He thought of him with affection, and remembered how many times he had given him sound advice which had never been followed, but of which he now saw the value; and now that was all at an end, and what an end!

After a time he rose, and thought he would go and dine somewhere quietly. He could not bear to go to his club and face his friends with this horror fresh on his mind, and so he had a quiet chop at one of the old eating-houses in Fleet Street, where he knew he should meet no one of his acquaintance, and it was late when he came back to his chambers.

When he had turned on the light, his eye fell upon something that lay on the table. It was the fatal paper, which he had taken from his pocket before going out. He took it up listlessly, to see if it bore any address to which he should send it in the morning. But it bore no address, and when he had read the endorsement, he stood some minutes motionless with the paper in his hand, as if he were turned to stone. He saw it was a will, or rather a codicil to the last will and testament of Richard Markham, which had been executed that very afternoon. After a time, he laid the paper again on the table, and stood with his back to the fire thinking what he should do.

So there really had been a new will, or a codicil to alter the old one, had from the hint dropped by his poor friend, Mr. Harvey, he gathered that the alteration had not been in his favour. The temptation was strong to open the paper and see how he stood, but he was restrained by a scruple, and continued to stand by the fire looking at it as it lay on the table before him. He supposed that his loss would be James's gain. James had always been his father's favourite, comparisons had been drawn between him and James, to James's advantage; James had been proposed to him as a pattern, though he hated James's cautious ways which seemed to him mere selfishness. The selfishness of his own idle extravagant life naturally did not occur to him. James, he thought, was a schemer, who had always got the better of him, and had robbed him of his birthright as eldest son. What would be the justice of James taking more than a fair share of his father's estate? The longer he thought about it the stronger grew the temptation to open the paper and see what provision it made for him. There it lay before him, as it were looking him in

the face and inviting him to take it; a riddle awaiting solution, charged with fate and the whole current of his future life. He took it in his hand and weighed it: on this fatal sheet his fortunes depended. In a matter so vital it was folly to be over-scrupulous; as he gathered, he was the person most likely to be affected by its contents; surely he was entitled to know them, and it could not matter to anyone else whether he knew them or not.

He sat down and opened the paper. it was a codicil to the old will, very short, and it dealt almost entirely with the one subject of George's share in the disposition of the estate. He laid the paper down in dismay, and sat in silence looking into the fire.

"A thousand pounds and nothing more," he kept repeating to himself. "It is monstrous. What have I done to deserve to be treated thus?" Independently of the money, how was he to explain his position to the world, for his friends had always looked on him as his father's heir. How was he to live on the slender income inherited from his mother, which, luckily for him, she had so tied up that he could not touch the capital? All his habits and tastes were expensive; he constantly outran his father's liberal allowance, and as constantly had to appeal to him for money to clear his debts. There was no one now left to appeal to, for it would be idle to approach James, who he knew would stand on his rights and give him his thousand pounds and no more? Besides which, he could not bring himself to beg of his younger brother; no, that at all events was not to be thought of—and there lay the accursed paper in his lap. What was to be done with it? He supposed it ought to go to Messrs. Harvey & Moor, his father's lawyers. But that might wait till tomorrow. And poor Harvey was dead. That however did not affect the matter, for the firm was there. He must send it to them to-morrow, he supposed.

It was then that some pestilent devil at his elbow seemed to whisper in his ear, "Why send it at all?"

The idea covered him with shame and he scouted it at first, for reckless as his life had been he had never stooped to anything dishonourable. But it would not be so dismissed, and kept pestering him with suggestions of the ease with which the codicil might be suppressed. Putting things together he made out that Mr. Harvey had taken the codicil to Mr. Markham, who had signed it, the witnesses being Mr. Harvey himself and the footman, whose names appeared in the document; that Mr. Harvey had taken the paper away with him, and had arrived at the station on the Piccadilly tube at pretty nearly the same moment when he got there himself. The rest of the story we know.

"Then," thought George, "one of the witnesses was dead, and the footman could only testify that he signed a paper, not knowing what it was, which might have been something quite different." The lawyers, of course, had instructions for drawing the codicil, and probably a rough draft of its contents, but what evidence could they produce that it had ever been executed? The only proof of that was the codicil itself and that now lay in his lap; and the fire was burning opposite him. It would only be an affair of a moment, the hateful deed would be reduced to a few ashes, and he would inherit the half of the estate to which he maintained he was entitled by every consideration of justice and fair-play. James would have the other half, which was his fairly enough, and he was already doing well in business, and so would really be much better off than his elder brother. The temptation was strong; almost irresistible; the devil at his elbow kept urging him; and his very fingers itched to twitch the fatal paper from his lap on to the glowing coals. But his better self restrained him: he could not bring himself to do it, and locking the deed up in his drawer he went to bed.

He was roused next morning by a messenger from his father's house, with a letter from his brother James, enclosing another addressed to himself

“Dear George,” it began, “You will not be surprised to hear that all is over here. Our dear father died quietly last night. You will, no doubt, come at once to help me make the necessary arrangements. I enclose a letter for you from Messrs. Harvey & Moor, which, as it was marked ‘immediate,’ I ventured to open. You will be shocked at its contents. Your affectionate brother,
JAMES MARKHAM.”

Messrs. Harvey & Moor’s letter announced the unfortunate death of the elder partner from an accident on the railway. They thought, as he was engaged in business for Mr. Markham at the time of his decease, they ought to lose no time in communicating the sad intelligence to Mr. Markham’s representative.

George had not expected his father’s death so suddenly, and was much affected. He wished he had been with him at the end. Their relations had not always been friendly, but he admitted the fault had been his own, though the punishment in time end was unfairly severe, he went home therefore with mixed feelings of sorrow and resentment.

He alighted at the same station on the tube railway which had been the scene of the catastrophe the night before, and he looked with horror at the fatal spot. As he made his way to the lift he had an uncomfortable feeling that he was being followed. To be sure a crowd was going with him, but it was not that; he saw no one especially noticing him, and could not account for the feeling. He had given up his ticket and entered the lift, when the attendant said “Ticket, please,” to some one behind him. He turned but saw no one.

“Old gentleman with you, sir?” asked the attendant. “Why, what has become of him?” he continued, looking about him.

“No. There is no one with me,” said George, much surprised.

“Well, I’m dashed,” said the attendant, staring about. “He’s gone, anyhow. That’s rummy”; and then he attended to his duty and started the lift.

George found the great house with all the windows darkened: the straw with which the street had been strewn during the late owner’s illness deadened all sound from outside, and within was the silence of death. James met him, already attired in funereal weeds, and his wife was there whom George disliked, for he thought her intriguing and meddling, and mistrusted her influence on James himself. He knew instinctively he had no friend in her should any question arise about the disposition of the estate. He went and saw his father; the tears stood in his eyes as he thought of the unkindness that had grown up between them year by year, and he was touched with remorse as he recalled the many occasions on which he had given cause for his father’s displeasure. He even, at that moment, forgave him that fatal codicil, though the feeling of resentment returned as he sat at luncheon with James and his wife, and thought how unfairly they were to benefit at his expense. He took his part in the arrangements for the funeral and other matters, but would not stay in the house, and returned in the evening to his chambers in the Temple, anxious and dispirited, and with a sense of impending calamity. And then he remembered that he was to have sent that paper to the lawyers in the morning, and had not done so. Well, it was too late to-night he would do it in the morning. He would be glad to be rid of it and be put out of his misery.

His sleep was not untroubled. He seemed to go back to the time when he was a boy, and his father a younger man, who had been kind to him and proud of his performances in his school games, at which James had always been a duffer; and then his father’s face grew serious and displeased as it had become in later life; and then it melted away into another face, the face of his old friend Harvey, sad and warning, and oh, horror! there were streaks of blood, and with that he

awoke. Morning was beginning, he could sleep no more; a cold bath restored his nerves, and a walk in the brisk morning air before breakfast braced him up somewhat for the coming day.

Days passed and the time came for the funeral, and after that he knew the executors would be moving in the matter of the will, and questions would arise about the codicil. It still lay in his drawer. He had put oil from day to day taking the irrevocable step of sending it, which would deprive him at once of all claim to what he held was his rightful inheritance. He said to himself it was useless to put it off; it could make no difference to him whether he sent it now, or kept it a few days longer: the result would be the same; and yet he had not the courage to do the fatal act. The pistol was at his head as it were, and his finger on the trigger, and he dared not pull it, though he knew he was doomed. He grew pale and anxious and avoided society. Of James he saw as little as possible, though family arrangements made it necessary they should meet sometimes. He fancied his sister-in-law looked at him with an air of subdued triumph, though what could she know about the codicil and its contents? It raised his bile and hardened his heart, and he thought how easily if he pleased he could defeat her.

Mr. Markham's executors were two, Mr. Winter, a City magnate, and Sir Charles Mallet, a retired Indian civilian, and they were already in communication with the solicitor firm of Harvey & Moor. The only will in evidence was that made some years before, which gave the two brothers an equal share in the estate. But Mr. Moor produced the draft of the codicil which upset this arrangement, and which he believed had been duly executed, though at present it could not be found.

"What makes you think it was executed?" asked Sir Charles.

"I think so," said Mr. Moor, "because we had Mr. Markham's instructions to send it to him for signature, he being then ill in bed. It was therefore copied out fairly, and my partner, Mr. Harvey, took it with him to Mr. Markham's house. He was seen there by both the sons, and we know that Mr. Markham signed something, for a servant, whom we can produce, witnessed it, and we presume it was the codicil. Mr. Harvey, as you know, was unhappily killed on his way home, and the document which he no doubt had with him was, we presume, lost or destroyed in the accident."

"What the servant witnessed," said Mr. Winter, "may have been only a transfer of stock or something of that kind."

"Perhaps, but we are not aware of any such transfer being made at that time."

"On the other hand," said Sir Charles, "Mr. Markham may have changed his mind and altered the codicil before signing it. I confess it seems to me it was a monstrous piece of injustice from first to last."

"Well, gentlemen, what do you suggest?" said Mr. Moor.

The executors debated about the matter a little longer and at last it was agreed to have another meeting at which the two Markham sons, who were principally concerned, should be present.

"What could induce my old friend Markham to make such a change in his will as that unhappy codicil was to have done?" said Sir Charles as the two executors walked away together.

"I know he was much put out by his elder son's extravagance," said the other, "and had paid a deal of money at times to get him out of debt. I suppose he thought that should be brought into the account."

"Well, I should be sorry if George lost his share. He is a good fellow at bottom," said Sir Charles, "and I dare say he has sown his wild oats by now. But what about this tiresome codicil? Do you think it was really executed, and if so, shall we ever find it?"

“Goodness knows,” said Mr. Winter. “At all events I think it will give us a lot of trouble. Dear me! Who would be a trustee or executor?”

“I don’t like James, the younger brother,” said Sir Charles. “George is a much better fellow, though he has been playing the fool.”

“And it is James,” said Mr. Winter, “whose interest it is to put forward the codicil.”

“You mean he will oppose the probate if we propound the old will without it?”

“Well,” said Mr. Winter, “I know something of James in the City, and he is a good man of business.”

“I see,” said Sir Charles. “Good-bye; here I think our ways part.” And then they shook hands and separated.

The proposed meeting at which the two brothers were to attend was fixed about a week later at Mr. Markham’s house, where James Markham and his family were staying to see about the necessary domestic arrangements. Thither, at the time appointed, George Markham made his way, alighting at the tube station nearest the house as usual. He hated the sight of the place, which had such painful associations, and had he thought of it, he would have come another way, but from force of habit he had unconsciously followed the usual route. As he gave up his ticket at the lift the attendant looked hard at him, and then beyond him over his shoulder. The man’s manner made George turn round to see what he was looking at. But he saw nothing.

“He’s gone again,” muttered the man. “I don’t ’alf like it. Bill,” said he to another attendant when he had discharged his living cargo at the top, “did ye see that grey-haired old gen’leman as come to the lift at the bottom, but didn’t get in?”

“Not me,” said Bill, who was not interested. “Well, but look ye here! He follers that gen’leman as you see there walking away, up to the lift, and when I arst ’im for ’is ticket, why—he isn’t there.”

“Trying to bilk the company, very likely,” said Bill. “If you can ketch ’im, p’rhaps you’ll get a reward.”

“Don’t be a fool, Bill,” said the other. “I tell you this has happened every time that same man comes ’ere. And I’ll tell you another thing,” said he, lowering his voice. “Do you remember that accident the other day when an old gentleman was killed?”

“Why, in course I do. What of that?”

“Why, as they carried ’im away, I see ’is face, and I see that face again just now at the foot of the lift.”

“Oh, go along with you!” said Bill, as he walked away. “I don’t believe in ghosties—you’ve been drinking and got the horrors.”

The meeting took place in the dining-room. Both the executors were present with Mr. Moor, and George and James, by whose side his wife was sitting, with whom he frequently conferred in a whisper.

Both brothers had, of course, been formally made acquainted by the solicitor with the terms of the will, and also of the missing codicil.

But the solicitor stated the case afresh to make sure that it was understood in all its bearings by those concerned. The old will was obviously to be put forward for probate: about that there was no room for difference of opinion. The only difficulty was about the codicil. The codicil being missing, the question was one of proof that it had ever been executed.

Sir Charles Mallet said the whole thing was very uncertain. Even if the codicil had been duly executed, of which positive evidence seemed wanting, how were they to know whether it had been signed without alteration?

“It is not for me,” he continued, “to criticise Mr. Markham’s motive in making that codicil, but the effect of it, if I may be allowed to say so, is so unusual in the difference it makes between his sons, and so serious in the case of the elder brother, that it is quite conceivable that the testator may have changed his mind before signing. A stroke of the pen, for instance, might have converted Mr. George Markham’s thousand pounds into ten or twenty thousand, or even more.”

Mr. Winter, the other executor, seemed to concur with this view. He said he did not quite see his way to act on the draft codicil in the absence of the document itself. But, of course, he would be guided by the lawyers.

“I think,” began James, “my dear father’s last wishes—” but here he was stopped by marks of disapproval on the faces of his auditors.

“You were about to say something, Mr. Markham,” said the solicitor.

Mrs. James had been whispering to her husband, and obedient to her prompting he proceeded.

“I was going to ask whether we should be doing right if we disregarded what we positively know to have been my father’s last wishes as to the disposition of his estate.”

“You mean that you should take my share as well as your own?” said George, who had not spoken before.

But James took no notice of this remark. “Do I understand,” said Mr. Moor, “that you will oppose the probate of the will without the codicil?”

“Well, I am of course in a somewhat difficult position,” said James, “being an interested party. But I have to consider others as well as myself, who would be affected; for myself, I might be disposed to waive any claim, but there is my wife, and there are my children, who would have rights in the matter, and so—well, gentlemen, you see the difficulty of my position.”

His speech ended rather lamely, and it was received by the company in silence. Sir Charles looked at his colleague and raised his eyebrows. The other nodded, and the party broke up without any formal resolution, it being understood that the executors would be guided by legal advice in their procedure.

Sir Charles shook hands with George as they went out, and said it was an awkward business, and he was sorry for him if things went wrong. As for James, Sir Charles managed to avoid his parting salute.

“James showed very badly,” he said to his colleague as they walked away. “He should have held his peace. That cant about his wife and children was in bad taste.”

“You’ll see James means to have his knife into his brother,” said Mr. Winter. “We are in for a lawsuit over this business if I am not much mistaken.”

Meanwhile the codicil still lay lurking in the drawer of George’s writing-table in the Temple. The longer he deferred sending it, the harder it seemed to be to do so. He still said to himself he supposed it had to be done, but the more he thought about it the more cruel did the necessity appear. It was monstrous injustice to rob him of what his father had intended to give him by the will. Sir Charles Mallet had almost said as much at the meeting, and when he shook hands with him at parting. And James, with his hypocritical pretence of shielding himself behind the absurd rights of his wife and children! If anything would make him keep back the codicil it would be a desire to defeat James and his odious wife. James, with half the estate and a flourishing business in the City, was a rich man already, richer than he himself would be, even if he got his share. James ought to be satisfied with that, and not try to rob his elder brother of his rightful

inheritance. With these thoughts George worked himself up into a passion of resentment against his brother, his sister-in-law, the codicil, the lawyers who drew it, and every one concerned about it, and persuaded himself that he was the injured victim of a conspiracy to defraud and beggar him. And all the while the same pestilent little devil at his elbow kept whispering, "Don't send it, don't send it; burn it, burn it."

And yet, when he got to his chambers, took it out of the drawer, and looked at it and at the fire, he could not do it.

"Not yet, not yet," he said to himself, and he put it back into the drawer and locked it up. But he had taken a step nearer the fatal act, and the next step would be a short one.

And James; he too was not quite happy. He had been greatly surprised to learn the contents of the codicil, which went far beyond any change he had imagined it would make in the disposition of the estate. He was not without affection for his brother, who had protected him at school, though he laughed at him and thought him a muff, and who had always acted generously to him as they grew up. Underneath a crust of cold selfishness still glowed the embers of their old friendship, and his first thought on reading the lawyer's communication had been: "It is very hard on poor George; what will he do?" It even occurred to him to let the matter of the codicil drop, especially as the document itself had been lost, and there was no positive proof of it ever having been executed. He was well off; the estate was a large one, and half of it with what he had would make him a rich man. He could afford to let George's half go as the old will had intended it should. But, unhappily, James consulted his wife, who overpersuaded him, and suggested the arguments which he had employed at the meeting, and by which, with her help, he at last succeeded in convincing himself. His father no doubt thought he was acting for the best, and his last wishes ought to be sacred; he had never cost his father a penny since he started in life, whereas George had bled his father's purse freely over and over again, and that surely ought to be taken into account. And then there were his wife and children—but here he paused: the faces of the executors at the meeting when he used that argument recurred to his memory, and he felt it would not do. He even blushed slightly at the recollection, and felt he had lowered himself by stooping to such a shallow pretence, which deceived nobody, not even himself.

Had James at this point been left alone he was not incapable of a generous decision. He had half a mind as he left the meeting and realised the unfavourable impression his claims had made on the executors, to write to the lawyer and say he waived any claims he might have arising from the codicil, and was content to abide by the original will; but he reckoned without his wife. Her tears and reproaches overcame his weak leaning to the generous side, and he resolved to claim his legal rights under the missing codicil, if his lawyers advised him that he had a good case.

The matter therefore had to be decided in a court of law, for the executors decided on ignoring the draft codicil, and propounded the original will. There was a special jury em-panelled, and the highest talent of the Bar was employed on either side. James and his wife were there throughout the whole proceedings. George would not go near the place. In a manner he was relieved by the course things were taking. If the court decided that the codicil was to be upheld, why he had done no harm by keeping it hidden; the result would only be the same as if it had never been lost. If, on the other hand, the codicil should be negatived, he would take it as his justification in suppressing what he held to be an unfair invasion of his rights as the elder son. He was not really satisfied with these arguments; his conscience told him he was guilty of a dishonest act, and so far prevailed that he could not bring himself to show his face in court. He therefore spent the day in the country; the trial, he was told, would certainly take all day, and he would hear the result when he returned in the evening.

He had a long tramp over the Surrey hills, from Epsom race-course to Headley Common and Boxhill, returning by Mickleham and Leatherhead. The day was lovely, the larks singing in a sky of heavenly blue, the trees were still decked in the fresh virgin green of spring, and there was that delicious brisk buoyancy in the air that makes a man say life is worth living. But to George, at that time, it did not seem so. Life seemed to him a sordid affair. Take his own case; think of the choice before him: on one hand to be honest and a beggar, or on the other to be wealthy and a thief. Was such a life worth living in either case? Between the horns of this dilemma he was miserable. It haunted him as he walked, and as he ate his solitary luncheon at the wayside inn. His conscience troubled him; his honour in any case was smirched; whatever reparation he might make would not wipe off the stain; and that being so, that pestilent little tempter suggested, "Why worry about it? You have gone so far, you can't undo the fact that you have been guilty; it is too late to mend matters; go home and burn the deed. If the jury decide against you it won't be wanted, and if they decide for you it will be best in the fire to make things safe."

It was with this resolution finally fixed in his mind that George returned to town and sought his chambers. A telegram and some notes lay on his table, as he naturally supposed, containing a report of the result of the trial. He felt no impatience to learn what it was; he was disgusted with himself and the whole business.

The telegram was from the lawyers, and said:

"Will maintained, codicil upset." A later note from them confirmed this, and offered congratulations. Another note from Sir Charles Mallet, warmly expressed, said how glad he was of the result: that for his part he could not believe his old friend Mr. Markham really had signed a deed which was so obviously unjust.

"If he only knew," said George to himself, "that the codicil lies at this moment in the drawer under my hand, what would he think of me?"

He sat down to consider what he should do. He was now a rich man, but he felt no elation. It was however impossible to draw back. He must go on to the end. If ever the codicil were to be given up, it should have been done before the trial. The half of the estate was now legally his; to give it up would be quixotic. He half persuaded himself that his father, had he lived, would have reconsidered such an unfair division of the estate, and that the result of the trial, could he know it where he was, would not be displeasing to him.

He went to dine quietly at a City eating-house, not feeling fit for society, and unable to face the congratulations of his friends if he went to his club. He sat an hour over his port wine, making up his mind. He now had what he held to be his just rights, and it was necessary to make them secure. If he had made a bargain with the devil, at least he would have the fruits of it. The codicil should be destroyed that night, and James, with his odious wife, should be finally defeated for good and all.

Having made up his mind he went back to his chambers. His mind was in a strange confusion, a sort of nervous oppression weighed on him as he opened the door and entered. A fire was burning in the grate sending flickering gleams about the room. He turned on the lights; unlocked the drawer, and laid the fatal paper on the table. He stood a minute looking at it, and then he suddenly discovered he was not alone. Seated by the fire with his back to him was a man, whose grey head was visible over the top of the easy chair. George was on the point of asking who he was and what he wanted, when something seemed to arrest his speech, and he could only regard his strange visitor in silence. The figure rose slowly and turned to confront him across the table. The face was the face he had seen in his dream, the face of his old friend Harvey, and it regarded him with an earnestness that penetrated his very soul. George was unable to speak, to act, or even

to move. He seemed fixed in a trance and could only look piteously at that serious face and wait in terror for what was to come. Still keeping its gaze fixed on him, the figure advanced to the table and laid its hand on the paper that lay there. Its regard was severe, but not unkindly; it seemed even to express pity and sorrow. Resting its hand on the fatal codicil it seemed to ask a question. George knew what it was, and the answer it wanted. Fierce debate raged within him, greed and passion on one side, shame and remorse on the other fought for supremacy, and still that steady gaze penetrated his inmost being. Gradually his evil passions seemed to melt before those calm searching eyes; his conscience awoke to better things; the resolution to do right prevailed. He knew the question that was put to him, and in a passion of tears he stammered out, "I will," and sinking into a chair he covered his face with his hands. When he removed them he was alone.

When he recovered himself he rose with a lightened heart, for a weight seemed to have been lifted from him. Reparation, that was the question that he had answered; reparation was what he had promised. It could not be made too soon. It should be made that very night. He put the codicil into an envelope and sealed it, and addressed it to Messrs. Harvey & Moor. They need not know whence it came, and so his shame need not be exposed. And yet without confession the reparation would not be complete. He would write to James and tell him all. And in order that James should learn it first from him, and not officially from the lawyers, he would take the letter himself and put it in the letter box after posting that for the lawyers.

As he walked through the streets in the cool night air he felt happier than he had ever felt in his life. He had done right at last, and had been mercifully saved from consummating his shameful offence. He now looked back on it with horror. What had possessed him to act as he had done? Thank God! he had been spared the worst. His heart was light and joyful, and he could even smile to think of the lawyers' surprise next morning.

He posted his letter and then walked on to his old home, and having dropped the letter for James in the letter box, found his way to the tube station, which had been the scene of poor Harvey's accident. Had he really seen his old friend that night, or was it a vision of his imagination? He could not tell; whichever it was, it was Harvey who had been his saviour; to Harvey he owed the recovery of his self-respect, the victory over his worse self. He thought of his old friend with love and gratitude, and thanked God for him.

The platform was congested with people from the theatres which had just closed. Never had he seen such a crowd. The train came up and George was carried in the rush to the entrance of the car. It was over full already; his foot was on the step when the gate was slammed in his face; he could not extricate himself from the crowd; the train began to move, his foot slipped, and was caught between the car and the platform; the train went faster and faster; he was dragged down and down, and he knew no more.

* * *

Two missives were put into James Markham's hand early next morning. One was George's letter:

"DEAR JAMES,

"I have had the codicil all the time. It came into my hands by a mere accident, and at first I did not even know what it was. To-night I intended to destroy it, but I was prevented by my good angel. I have just posted it to Messrs. Harvey & Moor. They will not know whom it comes from. I ask you to keep my secret, to forgive me, and if you can to think kindly of your brother. "GEORGE."

The other letter was from St. George's Hospital, to say that a gentleman, named Markham, had been brought there with injuries received in a railway accident, which it was feared would be fatal, and that he wished to see his brother, Mr. James Markham, before he died.

James was shocked and deeply affected. The old fraternal affection, which had been buried under a load of selfishness and greed, awoke within him. George's noble renunciation of the advantage he had won, and candid confession of the wrong he had done, filled him with admiration. He could not help asking himself how he would have behaved had he been subjected to such a trial.

When he stood by George's bedside it was too late. He had died during the night. The tears stood in James Markham's eyes as he took the cold hand in his, and bending over his brother whispered, "George, I forgive you; your secret is safe with me."