

# Gleanings From Some Old Wills.

BY MRS. MARY N. ROBINSON.

It is said, and often with truth, that continuations are failures. But there are exceptions to all rules, and it is to be hoped this may be one of them.

When the request came to prepare a paper for this meeting, there were several subjects which suggested themselves. Perhaps it was a certain amount of indolence which induced the following out of "the lines of least resistance," and it seemed possible that a few glimpses of the ideas and modes of those who lived and moved in this fair county of ours, one hundred and sixty years ago, might prove of some interest to us. So to-night you are asked to listen to some gleanings from the old wills to be found on record at our Court House. Quaint and curious, and perhaps laughable though they may seem, they are quoted *verbatim*. Neither the spelling nor the phraseology is changed, and they are all to be found in Book B, Register's Office. The pages are given, but not the names, except in a very few instances.

The old wills, as a rule, begin with a certain form of words, generally expressing a desire to be buried in a decent and Christian manner, with hope of the resurrection. Occasionally the testator states where he desires that his earthly tenement shall be laid. There are a couple of such requests.

October 3, 1760, page 485: "I desire to be buried in the Graveyard adjoynth Mr. Elder's Meeting House in the township of Paxtang, as near to the Graves of my former Wife and children as may be convenient, provided I die so near to that Graveyard that it may be prudent for my Executors to carry my Body there." But if this request were complied with, his grave (Moses Dickey) is not marked.

And John Powan, May 16, 1758, p. 332, desires to be interred in the Church yard of St. John's, Pequea, near those of his own family. He bequeathed "£3 to be paid into the hands of the Church Wardens then being in three years after my decease: For to keep the Glass of the windows of the said Church in repair."

The first will in date, quoted here, is May 17, 1756, p. 130. He begins by saying he is "sik, licke, worttly bequeatch neassessery planddation to son John, whereon I live now with all my Bond Notes and cash and all my moveable because that he is my best son, and attents me to my Mind to my end, to my other children one English Shilling each."

August 27, 1760, p. 333. "I give over to my house-woman (is this a translation of haus-frau?) Barbara, all my Estate and Goods therewith to keep house and likewise with all Privileges Like She it finding Good to her Widow Station remaining." And another, April 6, 1761, p. 379, "allows his wife a good Bureau."

Nearly every will contains a provision against the remarriage of the

widow. But here is an exception, June 8, 1757, p. 336: "To Agnes, my beloved Wife one third of my whole Estate both real and personal, for ever, and one Kettle, two iron Potts, a Spinning Wheel, a Feather Bed, two Pewter Basons, two Plates, a Cow, a Hive of Bees and all her Cloaths and Linnen, as also by Bible and one other book called True Christendom."

P. 350. He directs that for his wife's "maintenance she shall have every year 15 bushels Wheat, 5 of Rye, 150 pounds of Pork, 50 pounds of Beefe, a barrel of Syder and Apples enough to eat when they are plenty, 8 pounds Wool, 1 bushel Salt, 10 pounds Flure, 10 pounds Tow, a pair of Shoes, a Bed and an upper Bed, one Great Pillow and two small ones each with one lining, one pair of Linnen Bed Sheets together with a Back (bag?) of Chaff and a Bed Stead and all her Cloaths shall be her property and nobody shall have any pretentions to them."

P. 355. "To my wife the sum of Money of a good black Suit of Cloath she likes best."

P. 445, December 2, 1769. "I allow that they raise a House of Logs Two and Twenty feet by Eighteen wide with a Stone Chimney, ye Said House is to be built on my Plantation for my Wife to Live in During her Life time if she sees Cause and at her Death to leave it to whom she sees Cause." P. 243. To his wife "her Cloathing."

Page 141, March 28, 1755. To his wife "the Store Room, free use of the Kitchen, 15 bushels Wheat, 4 of Malt to make Beer, 2 barrels Syder, 3 gallons Apple or Rye Liquor, a sufficient quantity of Apples to eat or dry, as much Hackled Hemp or Flax as she can Spinn and as much Firewood as she shall have occasion for, and £200."

These wills are somewhat more liberal to the wife than the majority of them. For in those long past days a woman had few rights. It seems that even her "cloaths" did not belong to her, and every thing was in the man's power. Here is an instance:

P. 224, January 6, 1758. "I leave to my daughter Ann the Cow that was left her as a Legacy by her Grandfather." What would they have said on the subject of female suffrage, a so-called privilege to which the majority of women are indifferent.

Some of these old wills begin in rather unusual language. November 7, 1759, p. 387. "Intending to travel abroad, though in proper health and strength, I am sensible of the uncertainty of my life I therefore by these Presents do leave this as my last Will."

P. 410. "Being weak in Body and near to the grave I have firmly Resolved and there for Called Neighbors to pronounce my last Will and Testament to have it drawn in Writing to Prevent further Quarrels amongst my Heirs."

September 4, 1749, P. 295. "To all Christian People to whom it may come," begins another.

October 27, 1760, p. 303. "Whereas I Jacob Holzinger Considered by my Self to set my Self in Security of the Death, and also the Security when he comes so I considered by myself to make and ordain for my family."

P. 273. George Campbell, Sergeant in Capt. J. Singleton's Company, now in a hospital at Fort Ligonier, directs that he "be buried in a decent Manner after the form of the Country."

The daughters are not forgotten. April 18, 1756, p. 187. "To my daughter Sarah £20 in Money to be paid when she arrives at mature age also she is to be taught to read and nit and sow and fed and Cloathed till she be twelve years of age, and then to be free." P. 230: To another is left "one two year old Héffer on her day of marriage." In contrast with this, p. 232, a daughter is cut off with "one shilling she having behaved herself undutifully." And, p. 360, the testator leaves "to my son Godfried the sum of one shilling sterling for his full portion of my Estate, because of his meisbehaviour again his Father."

And, p. 379, April 6, 1761, William Young leaves money "to allow my wife a good burial."

Here are two curious expressions:

"Estate to be appraised by three indifferent Judgeable men." P. 368. "To be valued by any two judicious indifferent persons," September 16, 1761.

December 9, 1760, p. 375. It is rather interesting to know what our forefathers and foremothers were in those early days. One will says "and knowing that it is appropriate for All Men once to die," she mentions "my light colored Gown and Red Petticoat." Another speaks of the "Men once men and woemen," while a third thus enumerates her wardrobe, p. 436, September 2, 1765; "My sink lutstring Gown and Striped Gown and cardinal Cloke, likewise two peticotes, one red, the other white, and two aprons, my scarlet Cloke and Caleco Raper, my Callico gown, my black quilted peticoate, my striped Linnen gown and my Bible."

The men are equally definite. November 2, 1756, p. 145. This will says: "Wery sick and weak of body, to my friend, one Pare of Blew Seder Bridges a Blew Coat and Unter Jacket Red lidge Collar with Sleeves one Hatt one Pare Shoes by best being for tenting (attending?) me in my sickness to my End."

September 20, 1754, p. 147. Bequeaths "one Coat and Jaccot of an olive green Colour."

July 23, 1761, p. 372. This man was very gay in his tastes. He leaves to his brother "My blue stuff Coat and my red britches, my Blue Broad Cloth coat and my Beaver Hatt my Brown flir Coat and Jacket."

Another, August 5, 1761, p. 373, mentions "a Velvet Jacket and a Note of Ten pounds in the Pocket." And still another leaves "to my brother my best hat and the scarf that is on it."

March 13, 1758. Provides money "if his wife should be Indosed or want to get Bleeded."

Here is a quaint wording: "I give to the poor, the blind and lame who go about the country for relief the sum of £5." And another, p. 257, says: "to the Poor of the Menist Congregation of which I am a member the Sum of Twenty Pounds to be paid by the Elders of the said Menist Congregation for the time being for the use of the said Poor on the Decease of my Wife, not before."

There are a number of bequests to the different churches in the town and county. It may be interesting to note some of them.

P. 160, April 10, 1757. Philip Jacob Getz leaves "to the Calvinist Church in the Borough of Lancaster £6 to be paid six months after my decease, and

to be applied toward purchasing of Organs for said Church or paying the debts due for building the said Church as the Minister and Congregation shall agree.”

P. 177, February 14, 1757. Jacob Bichler of Leacock leaves “to the Elders of the Reformed Dutch Church one pound after my Disease which now stands on Andrew Seldomridge his Plantation for the Use and Behoof of the said Church only.” And Mr. F. R. Diffenderffer, than whom there is no higher authority on our Lancaster history, says that this is the church now known as “Zeltenreich’s,” which name has become Angelicized into Seldomridge.

P. 185, August 10, 1757. In Janet McCosh’s will she leaves “in case Derry Congregation shall in time coming make a pulpit for Mr. Roan, twenty shillings to help them to pay for it when it is done,” and she leaves Mr. Roan forty shillings.

P. 235. “£ good lawful money of Pennsylvania to and for the use and benefit of the Lutheran Church situate lying and being in Duke Street in the same Borough.

Another, p. 326. August 16, 1760, leaves “£4 lawful money of Penna. to the present Church Wardens of the High Dutch Protestant Lutheran Congregation in the Borough of Lancaster, to be employed by them for the Use and Benefit of ye Church of the said Congregation situate and lying in Duke Street in the said Borough of Lancaster to be paid within a month after my decease.”

P. 387, May 4, 1761. Theobald Windeck, a member of the Brethren at Ephrata, leaves the residue of his estate after his funeral expenses are paid, to that Society. The inventory givs thm £79.

P. 441, November 4, 1766. Michael Byerly, leaves “£50 to and for the use of the German Lutheran Trinity Church.”

P. 501, November 21, 1767. Jodocus Dobler leaves “To the Westrymen of the Charman Lutheran Church in Lancaster £50, to be employed by them for the use and benefit of said Church.”

P. 504. George Fiesel leaves £16 to the same Church, and p. 535, April 16, 1766, Leonard Leahner leaves it £25.

P. 435, October 18, 1764. Rudolph Breinisen leaves “To the Church Wardens of the Lutheran Church built on Georges Verns land the sum of £5, to be laid out by them in the keeping and in repair the said Church.”

P. 443, July 4, 1767, Leonard Bowser leaves “£5 to and for the use of the German Reformed Church situate on Orange Street.”

P. 483, August 26, 1763. Mary Dougharty gives to “the Congregation of St. James Church the Sum of Five Pounds for the Common use of the Said Congregation, and the same sum to the Friends Hospital in Philadelphia.”

P. 360. Leaves “£13 in my son Moses hands for my Funeral Charges. Against next Fall I leave £5 for the support of the Gospell to be put out at Interest and the Interest yeadly to be given to the Stated Minister and it to be continued through Generations, and I Charge the Said Trustees to be faithful in ye Charge committed to them.”

P. 428, September 28, 1764. “To the Trustees of the Philadelphia hospetole £100 for the use and benefit of the said hospetole, and to the Trustees of that Gramer School at Newark £100 for the use and benefit of said school to be both paid three years after my land is sold.”

P. 464, September 24, 1762. Charles Christopher of Lampeter township leaves "to the poor of our meeting house, Menonish, £20."

P. 546, February 9, 1765. Abraham Le Roy leaves £5 to "the Dutch Prisyterian Church on Orange Street."

P. 549, October 27, 1767. John Mitchell leaves "£10 towards the building of a Prisyterian Church or Meeting House in Drumore township near the old house known by the name of Chestnut Leavil meeting house provided the same be finished within eight years after my death, and Provided the same be built for the use of the Prisyterian Church which is or shall be in full union with the united Synods of New York and Philadelphia."

Some of the spelling in these old wills is unique. Widow becomes "widdo," marriage is "marig," the familiar name Baumgardner is "Baumcarner," and son-in-law is "son-in-ye-land," decent becomes "deccent," and one will gives "the Bead and Beadsted whereon I know lie one Spinnen Weel, one Chist, one Tea Cattle, the chise of them, one Iron Pott one frien Pan, 20 bushels Wheet, 50 pounds Beaken or Porcke." Instances like this can be multiplied. Let it be distinctly understood that nothing has been exaggerated. The instances quoted only cover a few years, and, as was said before, they are all to be found in Book B, in the Register's Office. In all probability the wills of a more modern date would offer just as many peculiarities, for after all human nature does not change with the passing years, and men and women are actuated and governed by the same impulses and feelings to-day as they were in those days of old.

In conclusion, among the many old documents which were studied in order to present to you the items contained in this paper, there is one will which perhaps in its quaint wording merits more than a mere abstract. It is found on p. 276, and bears date August 13, 1758, and comes from Warwick township:

"Whereas God came Bastian Reyer and his wife Augnes hath laid us Down by Crossing Sickness so they sought to make and leave Peace behind by their Children, by their life and in this their married people. And we old aged Bodys hope that our beloved Children will be satisfied with these our last Will. For it is one Child to us ike the others, and you shall divide in peace and be satisfied with that we left behind for you and by this our last Will stand and neither but (put ?) anything there of or there to. Then the Lord God will bless you in this and Everlasting Life and by this Writing which we leave before your eyes after our decease keep that and be in peace, and let Father and Mother rest in the Earth and Shleep and being satisfied therewith and we are in confession Sure."

If the hearing of all this has been one-half as interesting to you as it was in the compilation, the writer will feel amply repaid for the time spent over it.

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