

## The King of Brentford's Testament

*by*

William Makepeace Thackeray

The noble King of Brentford  
Was old and very sick,  
He summon'd his physicians  
To wait upon him quick;  
They stepp'd into their coaches  
And brought their best physick.

They cramm'd their gracious master  
With potion and with pill;  
They drench'd him and they bled him;  
They could not cure his ill.  
"Go fetch," says he, "my lawyer,  
I'd better make my will."

The monarch's royal mandate  
The lawyer did obey;  
The thought of six-and-eightpence  
Did make his heart full gay.  
"What is't," says he, "your Majesty  
Would wish of me to-day?"

"The doctors have belabor'd me  
With potion and with pill:  
My hours of life are counted,  
O man of tape and quill!  
Sit down and mend a pen or two,  
I want to make my will.

"O'er all the land of Brentford  
I'm lord, and eke of Kew:  
I've three-per-cents and five-per-cents;  
My debts are but a few;  
And to inherit after me  
I have but children two.

Prince Thomas is my eldest son,  
A sober Prince is he,  
And from the day we breech'd him

Till now, he's twenty-three,  
He never caused disquiet  
To his poor Mamma or me.

“At school they never flogg'd him,  
At college, though not fast,  
Yet his little-go and great-go  
He creditably pass'd,  
And made his year's allowance  
For eighteen months to last.

“He never owed a shilling.  
Went never drunk to bed,  
He has not two ideas  
Within his honest head--  
In all respects he differs  
From my second son, Prince Ned.

“When Tom has half his income  
Laid by at the year's end,  
Poor Ned has ne'er a stiver  
That rightly he may spend,  
But sponges on a tradesman,  
Or borrows from a friend.

“While Tom his legal studies  
Most soberly pursues,  
Poor Ned most pass his mornings  
A-dawdling with the Muse:  
While Tom frequents his banker,  
Young Ned frequents the Jews.

“Ned drives about in buggies,  
Tom sometimes takes a 'bus;  
Ah, cruel fate, why made you  
My children differ thus?  
Why make of Tom a dullard,  
And Ned a genius?”

“You'll cut him with a shilling,”  
Exclaimed the man of wits:  
“I'll leave my wealth,” said Brentford,  
“Sir Lawyer, as befits;  
And portion both their fortunes  
Unto their several wits.”

“Your Grace knows best,” the lawyer said  
“On your commands I wait.”  
“Be silent, Sir,” says Brentford,  
“A plague upon your prate!  
Come take your pen and paper,  
And write as I dictate.”

The will as Brentford spoke it  
Was writ and signed and closed;  
He bade the lawyer leave him,  
And turn’d him round and dozed;  
And next week in the churchyard  
The good old King reposed.

Tom, dressed in crape and hatband,  
Of mourners was the chief;  
In bitter self-upbraidings  
Poor Edward showed his grief:  
Tom hid his fat white countenance  
In his pocket-handkerchief.

Ned’s eyes were full of weeping,  
He falter’d in his walk;  
Tom never shed a tear,  
But onwards he did stalk,  
As pompous, black, and solemn,  
As any catafalque.

And when the bones of Brentford—  
That gentle king and just—  
With bell and book and candle  
Were duly laid in dust,  
“Now, gentleman,” says Thomas,  
“Let business be discussed.

“When late our sire beloved  
Was taken deadly ill,  
Sir Lawyer, you attended him  
(I mean to tax your bill);  
And, as you signed and wrote it,  
I prithee read the will.”

The lawyer wiped his spectacles,  
And drew the parchment out;  
And all the Brentford family

Sat eager round about:  
Poor Ned was somewhat anxious,  
But Tom had ne'er a doubt.

“My son, as I make ready  
To seek my last long home,  
Some cares I had for Neddy,  
But none for thee, my Tom:  
Sobriety and order  
You ne'er departed from.

“Ned hath a brilliant genius,  
And thou a plodding brain;  
On thee I think with pleasure,  
On him with doubt and pain.”  
 (“You see, good Ned,” says Thomas,  
 “What he thought about us twain.”

“Though small was your allowance,  
You saved a little store;  
And those who save a little  
Shall get a plenty more.”  
As the lawyer read this compliment,  
Tom's eyes were running o'er.

“The tortoise and the hare, Tom,  
Set out, at each his pace;  
The hare it was the fleeter,  
The tortoise won the race;  
And since the world's beginning  
This ever was the case.

“Ned's genius, blithe and singing,  
Steps gayly o'er the ground;  
As steadily you trudge it  
He clears it with a bound;  
But dulness has stout legs, Tom,  
And wind that's wondrous sound.

“O'er fruits and flowers alike, Tom,  
You pass with plodding feet;  
You heed not one nor t'other  
But onwards go your beat,  
While genius stops to loiter  
With all that he may meet;

“And ever as he wanders,  
Will have a pretext fine  
For sleeping in the morning,  
Or loitering to dine,  
Or dozing in the shade,  
Or basking in the shine.

“Your little steady eyes, Tom,  
Though not so bright as those  
That restless round about him  
His flashing genius throws,  
Are excellently suited  
To look before your nose.

“Thank heaven, then, for the blinkers  
It placed before your eyes;  
The stupidest are weakest,  
The witty are not wise;  
Oh, bless your good stupidity,  
It is your dearest prize!

“And though my lands are wide,  
And plenty is my gold,  
Still better gifts from Nature,  
My Thomas, do you hold—  
A brain that’s thick and heavy,  
A heart that’s dull and cold.

“Too dull to feel depression,  
Too hard to heed distress,  
Too cold to yield to passion  
Or silly tenderness.  
March on—your road is open  
To wealth, Tom, and success.

“Ned sinneth in extravagance,  
And you in greedy lust.”  
 (“I’ faith,” says Ned, “our father  
Is less polite than just.”)  
“In you, son Tom, I’ve confidence,  
But Ned I cannot trust.

“Wherefore my lease and copyholds,  
My lands and tenements,  
My parks, my farms, and orchards,

My houses and my rents,  
My Dutch stock and my Spanish stock,  
My five and three per cents,

“I leave to you, my Thomas”—  
 (“What, all?” poor Edward said.  
 “Well, well, I should have spent them,  
 And Tom’s a prudent head”)—  
 “I leave to you, my Thomas,—  
 To you in trust for Ned.”

The wrath and consternation  
What poet e’er could trace  
That at this fatal passage  
Came o’er Prince Tom his face;  
The wonder of the company,  
And honest Ned’s amaze!

“‘Tis surely some mistake,”  
Good-naturedly cries Ned;  
The lawyer answered gravely,  
“‘Tis even as I said;  
‘Twas thus his gracious Majesty  
Ordain’d on his death-bed.

“See, here the will is witness’d,  
And here’s his autograph.”  
“In truth, our father’s writing,”  
Says Edward, with a laugh;  
“But thou shalt not be a loser, Tom,  
We’ll share it half and half.”

“Alas! my kind young gentleman,  
This sharing cannot be;  
‘Tis written in the testament  
That Brentford spoke to me,  
‘I do forbid Prince Ned to give  
Prince Tom a halfpenny.

“He hath a store of money,  
But ne’er was known to lend it;  
He never help’d his brother;  
The poor he ne’er befriended;  
He hath no need of property  
Who knows not how to spend it.

“Poor Edward knows but how to spend,  
And thrifty Tom to hoard;  
Let Thomas be the steward then,  
And Edward be the lord;  
And as the honest laborer  
Is worthy his reward,

“I pray Prince Ned, my second son,  
And my successor dear,  
To pay to his intendant  
Five hundred pounds a year;  
And to think of his old father,  
And live and make good cheer.”

Such was old Brentford’s honest testament,  
He did devise his moneys for the best,  
And lies in Brentford church in peaceful rest.  
Prince Edward lived, and money made and spent;  
But his good sire was wrong, it is confess’d  
To say his son, young Thomas, never lent.  
He did. Young Thomas lent at interest,  
And nobly took his twenty-five per cent.

Long time the famous reign of Ned endured  
O’er Chiswick, Fulham, Brentford, Putney, Kew,  
But of extravagance he ne’er was cured.  
And when both died, as mortal men will do,  
‘Twas commonly reported that the steward  
Was very much the richer of the two.