ABSOLUTELY HER OWN MISTRESS.

BY J. T. J.

First Part.—Courtship.

Chapter II.

"If we have nothing else to give
We can give advice."—Old Proverb.

Clara, though amply provided for, was not without her troubles when her father was gone. Her chief trouble would have been Mrs. Briggs, the housekeeper, only happily that worthy woman was afraid of losing her situation by going too far. She was a strictly virtuous woman, in fact, full of virtue to the very brim, but her virtues were small virtues of a turbulent and effervescing kind, and she was a tyrant by nature; narrow in everything, meddling, fidgety, touchey, full of squibs and quibbles; always raising little difficulties to exalt herself; prone to boggle about trifles and stick when you least expected it; never quite right or happy; unwilling to balance the good of life against the evil, but rather making a trade of her trifling troubles; one of those people who make good servants but merciless masters and mistresses. Had their situations been reversed Miss Clara would have had a hot time of it with Briggs, and as the narrow understanding of the servant could not compound the larger sympathies of the mistress, Mrs. Briggs hesitated to carry it with too high a hand, though she longed to rule the young lady and make her act according to her will.

"I itches to tell Miss Clara my mind," she would often say in confidence to her daughter Sally. "Young foolish thing as she is, a spending money on orphan asylums an' jails. Its a waste o' money in my opinion, them as ge's children should provide for 'em. And her havin' them brats here to eat pears as would sell for money, it puts me past patience." Indeed Briggs was so outraged and annoyed by this last occurrence, that she plucked up courage to speak to her mistress on the subject, who answered with a calmness that was "truly aggravating," as the poor discomfited woman said:

"Why, the poor dear little creatures" exclaimed Clara, rousing herself from a sad reverie at the sound of the sharp voice at her elbow, "what I give is a mere drop in the sea. I have money enough and to spare, and the world is full of miserable, neglected little children. As for the pears, Briggs, they would spoil before we could eat them. We must give them away to somebody, and grown-up people don't enjoy half so thoroughly as children, poor little souls. Why, Sally is an orphan, and you are one yourself, and so am I," with a sigh. "You are tired Briggs, and that makes you fidgety; you must go to bed and take a good rest. I wish every little boy and girl in the world had as good a bed and a night-gown without a brack in it."

"Them pears would sell, for money in the Hamilton market," said Briggs eagerly, "and they're wasted on them gutty little things, as bread and butter is too good for. It's a pity miss, you didn't know a little more about economy, I'll make bold to say; I fears you'll have your eyes picked out o' your head."

"Not with you to protect me and take care of my interests," replied the young lady with provoking good temper. "Economy is a great virtue in a housekeeper, but no virtue at all in a princess; now, though I am not a princess, I need not sell my pears or save money foolishly, or deny poor children their little pleasures. I hardly know why I am here now my father is gone, but I am sure not for that, keep to your own sphere, Briggs, and you'll shine like a brass kettle, and don't meddle, and trouble me, for indeed I have trouble enough." But though Clara had put down Briggs for the time and subdued her, the memory of the scene, worried her over-conscientious nature, and she actually began to question herself as to the propriety of doing what she liked with her own.

But a greater difficulty was Clara's aunt, Mrs. Montgomery. This lady prided herself on being a clever business woman. She was much her husband's inferior in birth and education, but had managed that gentlemen and his property with such skill and dexterity that the property had speedily doubled itself in her hands, and her husband soon died leaving her the mother of an only son, but in absolute possession of everything "for the the term of her natural life," as the will expressed it. Education she deemed of no value, except as it tended to the increase of money. If a man understood the first four rules of arithmetic, and could write his name, that in her opinion was all that was necessary in the way of book-learning; so when little Jack's god-father, the Rev. John, sent her £50 sterling per annum for the boy's education, she put it in the Post Office Savings bank, and sent the boy to the common free school, a proceeding which occasioned the only quarrel Clara's father ever had in the course of his long life. At first Mrs. Montgomery listened civilly to half a dozen successive remonstrances, but took her own way. When, however, Mrs. Montgomery threatened to write to his brother and have the supplies cut off, her wrath rose, and a fierce battle ensued. At last, a compromise was affected, both parties boasting they had gained the victory. Mrs. Montgomery removed her son from the common school, and his uncle undertook his education for nothing. Clara assisted her father in Jack's education, but he discovered no taste for learning, and it was far more to their credit than his that they taught him to read and write, and pulled him through the mazes of arithmetic (as far as the rule of three, where he stuck fast). They read history with him constantly, but he never knew the difference between the Habeas Corpus act and Magna Charta. I have heard him assert that Henry the Seventh had six wives, and that Richard, the lion-hearted, killed the little princes in the tower with his own hand; and his uncle and tutor, who was present when he made these extraordinary statements, blushed a bright scarlet for shame and vexation at the lad's ignorance. But Clara put her father into a good temper again by laughing and declaring that history was full of errors, and perhaps Jack was right after all, "it's a long time ago; papa, and I shouldn't like to lay an oath who killed the little princes."

I have heard that Mrs. Montgomery was handsome in her youth, but this is a matter of tradition. At the time of Mr. Montgomery's death she was a short, stout, sharp-voiced, bad-countenanced woman of fifty; keen as a hawk in business matters, determined to rule in great things and small; fond of power and dress and whist; aggressive, predatory and unscrupulous in grasping what she had set her heart upon. The matter uppermost in her mind at present was her son's marriage, and had she possessed the power of Catherine of Russia or Elizabeth of England she would have married him at once, willing or not willing, to his cousin Clara, who was ten years his senior. But she had the common sense to see that if she attempted such an arbitrary measure they would only laugh at her, so she must attain her end by other means. She had no admiration for Clara, it was the property alone that attracted her. Though not averse to music she would rather eat a lark any day than hear him sing, so that Clara's musical attainments were rather a drawback than a recommendation, and as for her fancy work she considered it a pure waste of time and money. Her love of history she despised as unpractical, for is it not with the present we have to deal and not the past? The study of foreign languages she pronounced "folly and worse, for what need we care for any country but the one we live in?" She had never even heard of her niece's love of poetry, happily for Clara, but she thought her a strong, good looking, idle, good-for-nothing girl, because her work did not tell, and no money came of it; on the contrary, all her accomplishments tended to the spending of money on music, books, silks and other useless luxuries. Had the young lady been poor, she would have advised her son to avoid his cousin Clara as he would a pestilence, but as it was she was obliged to tolerate this living encumbrance to a hundred acres of land and a certain income for life. Perhaps a stranger contrast was never seen in one room than Clara and her aunt when that lady called three weeks after Mr. Montgomery's death, to advise, counsel, and condole with her neice. Clara, wounded and stricken from her recent loss, looked like a fair young goddess in sore distress, as her aunt (in a rusty black gown, with a fat hand on each knee) sat before her, and laid down the law as she understood it.

"You see, it's no use fretting for spilt milk, as the saying is," she began. "Your poor father's dead, and all the tears in the world won't wash him out of his grave, and the sooner you look into your affairs and set yourself to work the happier you'll be, in my opinion. If I was you I'd pack off Sally and let her get a place for herself, and brush about and do some of the house work. You and Briggs could do it all well enough, and you'd soon forget your father."

"I do not wish to forget him," answered Clara, who felt every word a blow.

"Well, well, it's natural to think of him sometimes, but the sooner you get to business the better; there's all this property to manage, and property is a great responsibility. A penny saved is a penny got, and if you take care of the pence the pounds will take care of themselves. You would add greatly to your income by reducing your expenses and changing your amusements. You might keep a couple of pigs with advantage, there's waste enough in this house to feed them; all the cabbage leaves and potato peels and rotten apples are quite lost for the want of them. Your poor dear father objected to pigs, and that shows what a poor farmer he was. You are not attending to me, Clara."

"I beg your pardon, aunt," apologized Clara, wearily. "You were saying—"

"That you could kill a pig for your own use in the fall."

"My dear aunt—I kill a pig!"

"Of course," said Mrs. Montgomery, "and the other would sell and help you to pay Briggs her wages; and if you cured you pig, and watched the markets, and bought a quarter of beef when it was cheap, it would be a saving, and cheaper than butcher's meat; for salted it would last you half a year. I am sure you'll excuse me, Clara, for giving you a little friendly advice; but you are really too foolishly generous in giving your honey to Briggs to sell for herself or allowing her to make use of it in the kitchen. Honey sells in Hamilton for a shilling a pound, and mark my words, Briggs is a sly woman, and what's your poor father the better, for her and Sally having two new black gowns out o' your pocket to mourn for him?"

"Aunty, my father expressly told me to put them in mourning, and Briggs has been with us for eighteen years, and is a faithful creature, I'm sure."

"She has an eye to her own interest, faithful or not, Clara, and I couldn't afford a black gown."

"Well, Aunty, I'll buy you one."

"Nonsense. I don't want to take money out o' your pocket, but to help you to save it. Now you might make a great deal more out of your garden if you'd give up cultivating so many useless flowers—not but they're very pretty, my dear, like yourself, but we can't live on beauty—and grow drumhead cabbages (they take the grub less than Savoys) and potatoes; you might pick the potato bugs yourself, and burn 'em—it's safer than poison. But whatever you do, Clara," sinking her voice to a mysterious whisper, "keep your mortgage and title deeds in your own hands (unless you prefer giving 'em to me to take care of for you in my safe), and never trust 'em a day to the lawyers, for the lawyers are the devil's own—just necessary evils to help us out o' scrapes, but not to be trusted unless you happened to marry one, and then your interest would be his interest. But if you're a wise woman, Clara, you won't marry with your property, unless, it should be some one of your own blood that you are sure cares for you, for those who marry strangers often get into a peck o' trouble. The man may be good looking enough, and yet he may be a scamp, in debt as likely as not, or there may be insanity in his family, or epilepsy, or poor relations, and that's worse than all. No doubt you'll have offers, and if you come to me for advice, now your poor father is dead, you'll be pretty sure to do right, for I know the world, Clara, and you may thank heaven that I am an honest woman with only your interest at heart."

Thus it was that Mrs. Montgomery counseled her niece at great length, and the young lady scarcely answered, but listened with impatient patience and many sighs, and when at last she took leave for all things come to an end—Clara took a long breath of relief, and went sweeping down in her black robes to the kitchen, and thus addressed her housekeeper: "Briggs, when you see Mrs. Montgomery coming again, give me instant warning, and let Sally saddle the pony at once and bring him round to the back door. She gives me great pain and annoyance when I see her alone, and I will never receive her again, unless Mr. Jack is with her. I am quite in earnest, and if you disobey me I shall be greatly displeased; for if she is a practical woman as you and she boast, so am I, and I will not be intruded upon."

After this spurt Miss Clara sailed off to her room and indulged in a long fit of weeping; and as she had not the courage to face her aunt boldly and put her down at once and for ever, she mounted her pony as soon as Mrs. Montgomery's gig appeared on the brow of the hill and fled away like a frightened hare in the opposite direction.

Chapter III.

"Go, light your cheeks at nature, do,
And draw the whole world after you."
Leigh Hunt.

The next time Mrs. Montgomery saw her lawyer she mentioned her scheme of joining Clara's farm to her own by a marriage between Jack and his cousin, and he quite approved, saying the little difference in age was nothing, and five hundred acres would be a pretty estate. Then she told him of the girl's strange conduct in persistently avoiding her, but that she did not object to Jack's company in the same way. "Why that is just what you want," said Mr. Martineau, "I would keep away if I were you and not trouble her with advice, but just give Mr. Jack a little more liberty, let him ride out with his cousin, let them be together as much as they like and the thing will come about naturally."

"I hope it will, she has lent him money to buy a gun—much he wants of a gun indeed—I should be quite angry with her for encouraging him in such a piece of folly but for the hope that a match will come of it."

"I think you have more reason to be pleased than angry," said Mr. Martineau; "things seem to be going on very nicely indeed, but I would not give a hint of love making; it will be more likely to come about as you wish."

So Jack was encouraged to take Clara out for drives during the winter which succeeded her father's death; "poor dear Clara is so lonely," said her aunt. He came in at the front door and went out at the back like a pet chicken; he plagued his cousin to sing, and got her to read to him, for he was mentally lazy and would rather be amused than exert himself to study, and in spite of herself he did her good and beguiled her of her grief, and continually broke in upon her loneliness, his noisy, jolly young voice echoing through the house as he came. He claimed her attention and would not let her mope, and though she was often very much bored by his society, nobody guessed it, not even Jack, for she roused herself as soon as he came and always received him with a smile. No one regarded him in the light of a suitor, and Jack himself never dreamt of such a thing; even Briggs, jealous as she was of her young mistress, would have laughed outright at the absurdity of such an idea; but Mrs. Montgomery had set her heart on the match, and Mr. Martineau, her lawyer thought it a very suitable one. As the winter passed the influence of nature—which Clara dearly loved—and of cousin Jack, whom she kindly tolerated, began to tell upon her and she brightened day by day. Her color came back and she grew plump again, and her face looked pensive, rather than sorrowful; if spring brought tears of sad remembrance, it brought smiles too, and every opening leaf seemed to preach ressurrection. Spring came earlier than usual, and Jack released from the plough (for Mrs. Montgomery exacted no work this year) cantered about with his cousin every where, his sound commonplace face and burly figure serving as a foil and set off to the fair classical, queenly looking creature who rode by his side. With Jack for a protection against assault and advice, Clara became very gracious to Aunt Montgomery, and treated all comers with a sweet gravity charming to see. She rather patronized Jack, tried to improve his mind, read Pepy's diary to him and Macauley's history, often felt very weary of his company, and longed for her father's, yet she unconsciously leant upon the boy and was better for his—not always welcome—presence. Others visited her and showed their kindness in various ways, for she was popular in her neighborhood and all wished her well. They recognized her as one who carried weapons for defense but never for attack. She was no woman's rival—indeed, the young ladies regarded her as a harmless old maid—and no one felt jealous of her beauty, some even scarcely admitted that she had any, but all liked her in their different ways. She was liberal of household receipts, and rare patterns of embroidery and crochet, quite willing that any lady should have a dress exactly like her own, and prodigal with flower seeds, roots and boquets, giving them away right and left. Perhaps she considered imitation the soul of flattery—as it is—and the somewhat audacious demands of her friends as a compliment to her superior taste, for she never refused help in matters of dress, never told tales, and could not have counted the numbers of people to whom she taught ornamental knitting, and tatting for love. Once Mrs. Wellington Swartz (a. U. E. loyalist) had the assurance to bring her daughter's wedding bonnet to Clara to be trimmed, "Because everything turns out o' your hands beautiful," and Clara asked papa's permission to do it in a coaxing, confidential whisper, and really succeeded in getting as much pleasure and a good deal more fun out of the bonnet, than the wearer. For once she was puzzled with too great an abundance of material, for a half bushel basket of artificial flowers, six yards of broad scarlet ribbon, and as much white and purple was provided for this crowning glory. Clara and her father kept the bonnet exploit to themselves, being really afraid to let it get abroad in their little society lest they should lose caste. But it was less her good nature than her naturalness that made Clara popular with young and old. There was nothing affected or assumed about her, her genuine ladyhood triumphed over her narrow breeding. She never met a neighbor without speaking to him kindly, or bending her fair young head with a smile in answer to his rough scarcely civil salutation, a courtesy not unappreciated by the coarsest man of them all. After an excursion to Niagara she was stopped by three old women, who had never seen a railway, or been ten miles from home in their lives, and questioned about her journey and "the big fall," and Clara felt pleased by their confidence, though Briggs declared she had never heard of "sich impidence." Jack, who was very proud of his cousin, often told of a scene he had witnessed in the Hamilton market, between an old Binbrook farmer, and a Glanford man from their neighborhood, the Binbrook man was boasting of the superiority of Binbrook turnips over those of Glanford, when he of Glanford suddenly turned the tables by pointing to Clara as she rode through the market with her father.

"Maybe you're right about turmits, but don't be crackin' yourself up, for you never riz anything like that."

The Binbrook man turned and looked, and Clara at that moment, recognizing the face of an old neighbor, bowed with her sweetest smile.

"I'm done," said he of Binbrook, "I'm beat. I'll up and skedaddle; we hain't got nothin' to come up to that."

Mrs. Montgomery was not the only person who had matrimonial plans for Clara; a very near neighbor had for many a year regarded her as his future wife. This was Mr. Patrick Mulrooney, who lived on the opposite hill, a steep and high hill, from which he looked down upon her with fond affection. This gentleman did not belong to the aristocratic settlement I am trying to describe, nor did he belong to the U. E. Loyalists. He told me that his father was a Tipperary peasant who had worked on the first road between Hamilton and Caledonia, and had his farm given him by the Canada company as a reward for his services. Mr. Mulrooney himself gave a very different account of his origin. He admitted that his father came from "ould Tip," but declared that he was "a descendant of princes who lived in Ireland before iver the bloody Saxon set fut on the soil." Be this as it may, the Mulrooneys throve and grew wealthy chiefly by rearing cattle for sale. They pulled down the shanty which had first housed them, and erected a large stone house of the tea chest order of architecture, and so soon as Mr. Montgomery died, Patrick, who had been sole possessor for many a year (as his parents were dead and his brother and sisters married and gone), determined to declare himself, and take home his bride, for he never doubted that the lady would accept him. He had stood in too much awe of Mr. Montgomery to make an advance in his lifetime, but the old gentleman had not been in his grave six weeks, before Mr. Mulrooney sent a short note asking, nay demanding Clara's hand in marriage, telling her he had loved her many a day, and now was the time to take him; a letter which shocked her almost as much as if it had been a bombshell. She consulted Jack about it, and he laughed so loud and long as he read the letter that his cousin thought proper to bring him to himself by a smart box on the ear.

"What are you laughing at, sir. The spelling? It's not a bit worse than your own. Do be serious and tell me what I am to do?"

"Why, answer it, of course," said Jack, and between them they framed a stiff decided no, scarcely cool, certainly not grateful for the compliment intended. Far from being daunted by this rebuff, Mr Mulrooney came to see Miss Clara, and Briggs thinking he came on business, pointed with her thumb to the garden. Into the garden the Mulrooney marched, a strong dark man, with beetling, thick eyebrows, and a countenance like a thunder-cloud. Clara started at the sight of him, and would gladly have run away had any retreat been open, and looked so tremulous and alarmed that Mr. Mulrooney must have been as blind as a bat if he had not seen that she was afraid of him.

"What do you want?" she asked, with a sort of gasp.

"I want ye for a wife, as ye well know, will ye marry me or will ye not," replied the Mulrooney.

"I will not," said Clara flushing and turning pale, and then flushing again with relief and hope, as she heard Jack's whistle."

"Ye may say no a thousand times, but I won't take no," returned the Mulrooney, "for I am tould whin the ledies say no they mane yis, and if ye won't marry me then I'll be a bachelor foriver."

At that instant Jack arrived, and Clara passing them both, fled to the house without a word.

"Good day," said Jack, scarcely knowing what to say—"come to borrow some money I suppose? Mr. Martineau does business for my cousin now, you know; you should go to him."

"What for thin would I borrow money?" replied Mulrooney, indignantly. "I have money enough to buy ye all up. I have more than ye all."

"Then I well its a good thing to have plenty," said Jack, who had very little, owing to his mother's stinginess.

"Good day to ye, and have a care how ye cross me again, ye little pretinder," said the great man as he stalked off the premises.

Jack always alluded to this as "the garden scene," and said that in Romeo and Juliet was nothing to it, but Clara felt alarmed and uneasy, and was destined to receive another shock a week later, in the form of a brown paper parcel containing a large blob of a brooch, a massive gold cross and a lady's ring, with the jeweler's bill wrapped around them to show her how much the Mulrooney had paid for them. Again she took counsel with Jack, who advised her to lay the thing before the parish priest, who was Mr. Mulrooney's confessor, and as she had no other adviser, and felt Mr. Mulrooney's suit both alarming and ridiculous, and didn't know what to do, she drove that very afternoon to Father McGrath's and sent Jack in with the jewels and authority to explain the matter while she sat out in the cutter and waited for him. Jack gave him the packet and begged him to put a stop to Mr. Mulrooney's attentions, as they were frightening his cousin, who was very nervous and sad since her father's death, and he told him of the garden scene and gave him Mr. Mulrooney's letter to read. The matter took the good priest by surprise, as Patrick had omitted to mention it in confession; "but what the divil was she doing in the garden, that I should say so, at this season of the year?" he asked.

"'Twas a fine day, sir and she went out to see the bees—she's very fond of her bees—and fed two or three that came out in the sunshine. She often picks them up in her fingers and they don't sting her."

"I wouldn't do that to be made Pope," said the priest. "Well?"

"Well, that's all, sir," said Jack. "Couldn't you give him a light penance; a hair shirt or peas in his shoes, or something to keep him straight?"

"And you call those light penances, do you? Your pretty cousin is without, you say. I'll go and speak to her," and presently the portly priest stood before Clara and bowing to her cried out in a rich brogue, with a smile that showed a white, even set of teeth, "Good day to ye, Miss Montgomery; it's a shame for that dirty reprobate to be frightening the beauty of the whole country side, that we're all proud of, high and low; and bringing disgrace on his priest and his religion by his impudence but I'll see to him."

Clara blushed deeply, and tried not to smile as she answered, but a dimple laughed out at Father McGrath in spite of her. "I am sure its very wrong to ask a protestant to marry him sir, and we thought you ought to know."

"Sure you're right, I'm the person to apply to. I'll make him keep his eyes in his pocket the dirty spalpeen and not be desiring what's meant for his betters, so I will," said the priest whose eyes twinkled with fun as he spoke, "make your mind easy, my dear, I'll tickle him up finely. If you have more trouble with him, just let me know. Good-day and a better husband to you."

For a time it really did seem as though the Mulrooney was subdued, but when the fourteenth day of February came, his spirit rose and he sent Clara a gorgeous valentine, representing two bloody hearts, stuck together by a yellow arrow, in which he called her his "spirit's bride." Jack wanted to take it to Father McGrath, but Clara threw it into the fire in disdain, and would not hear of such a thing.

Perhaps Mr. Mulrooney would have been content with occasional little protests of this kind, had not a rival appeared on the scene and driven him to desperation. This rival was Mr. James Thompson a collateral branch of the little Montgomery colony, a widower and the father of six children.

CHAPTER IV.

As much as I do serve! Why, that's the lady,
I do in birth deserve her, and in fortunes
In graces, and in qualities of breeding'

—Merchant of Venice

Mr. James Thomson had in his youth married Miss Drayton, and not without much opposition and many difficulties did he attain to that honor, for he was not considered by any means her equal; but husbands were scarce and the lady wilful. He was a nephew of Mrs. Montgomery, and an iron monger by trade, and no man in Canada knew better how to make money. Like Midas, he seemed to have a miraculous touch, and daily turned iron into gold. He had built a large stone house, with marble facings, about a mile from Mrs. Montgomery's, and there he lived occasionally, his children always. His wife had died from an accident, having been severely hurt by the overturning of a crater. Mr. Thomson was an Englishman, and a practical man, and prided himself upon both facts as though they had been virtues. He was highly respected, but not popular, being much too matter-of fact to be agreeable company; to him, a spade was a spade, indeed, and never an agricultural instrument. You had to say exactly what you meant, if you wished Mr. Thomson to understand you; for if one you indulged in a figure of speech, you lost his esteem. He remained a widower for two years after his wife's death—that he considered a proper and respectable period—and now he decided to marry Clara Montgomery. He was quite sure of success—being used to success in the iron trade, and never dreaming that any woman in her senses could refuse him. To be sure Miss Drayton had been advised to refuse him, but then he was poor; now he was rich and the case quite different. Success in ironmongering and success in love-making were, in his opinion, one and the same thing. But I wrong him by using the word love, a word he scorned as namby pamby and mean ingless, for he had no more romance in his nature than the iron which he sold, yet he admired Clara in his way and meant to marry her; considered it a good match for her. Her person was handsome; her property suitable; she was not too young; she was fond of children, and he had six; he had known her many years. She was good tempered and, he thought, tolerably sensible, but rather spoilt by indulgence, a defect easily set right by a little seasonable strictness on the part of a husband. Mr. Thomson made his proposal in a letter, which I presently intend to lay before the reader, and this letter he entrusted to his little son Dickey to take to Miss Montgomery. Clara was exceedingly kind to Mr. Thomson's children, and especially fond of Dickey, the youngest, a long-tongued, prattling little fellow of seven, with a silky brown head, an old puck's face, and a cast in the eye. She encouraged this little chatter box partly because he had been a pet of her father's, and partly for his own sake, and he often came alone to see her and made himself more at home than Briggs liked. He did not scruple to put his arms round her neck and kiss her on both cheeks, taking an ear in each hand to steady himself; a caress always well received and generally returned. This little chap, with the momentous letter pinned firmly inside his coat for safety, came struggling through the snow, and up to Miss Montgomery's on a stormy March day. Seeing him secure out and received him with open arms; kissed him affectionately, took off his wraps, and placed him in a warm chair with his feet to the cosey fire.

"I'm going to stay to tea," he gasped out as soon as he recovered breath a little, "may I play with the bricks, please?"

"Yes, you may dear," rubbing his hands in hers to warm them, "and I'll walk home with you to the very door; a brave little man you are to turn out to day."

"That's a letter," said Dickey, producing it. "A love letter from my pa. He's going to marry you—isn't that nice?"

"Why, Dickey, you little goose, what makes you think that?"

"Oh! I know it," said Dickey. "I had ear ache last night—don't you see the wol in my ear?—and I cried to be with pa and Uncle Tom in the parlor. I laid on the sofa and they thought I was asleep, and they talked about you, and pa said he was going marry you."

"You were a very naughty boy to listen, Dickey."

"Oh! They knew I was there. I couldn't go to sleep because of my ear, and I begged to bring the letter, and pa said no at first, but Uncle Tom said you would like it better if I brought it, so then he let me. We're going to have such a nice time when you're my ma. We won't have any nasty old governess then, for pa says you are a regular blue, whatever that means and you'll teach us and save the expense of the governess, and I'm sure it'll be twice as nice."

Clara's face flushed a little and her eyes widened, but Dickey building an arch on the hearth rug with bricks, prattled on unconscious of the change, wrought by his revelation.

"My pa wants to marry you all the more because you're such a healthy woman" he proceeded, "and he had such an awful long doctor's bill when ma died, and you can give Lotty lessons in music and she need'nt go to Miss Anderson any more. It will be nice to have her at home she makes such good taffy, and you make lovely pastry—you'll give us lots of tarts, won't you? Pa says he never tasted turkey stuffing to come up to yours," Clara gave a short brusque laugh which startled Dickey, but his arch falling down at that moment his attention was diverted, and the little tongue ran on as before.

"You stand no stiff, you old bricks, or I'll give it to you. Then you have lots of money Miss Clara and will be able to keep yourself and pay your servant, so you wont be an expense to poor pa, or cross as ma was after she hurt her spine; pa's glad of that."

"How do you know she was cross, you don't remember her?"

"Pa said so last night, and so did uncle Tom," replied the little fellow.

Tears sprang to Clara's eyes, and a sort of sorrowful green scorn came into her face. Suddenly she rose and walked about the room, thinking perhaps of the poor mother who had clung to this baby, in her pain, and grieved so sorely to leave him.

"Dickey, if the boy is father to the man, you will be a monster of practicality," she said at last, stopping and stroking his head.

"What more did your father say of me?"

"Look, my arch is up. He said you were silly about books and poetry and that but he's soon cure you and give you something better to think of; you could make up the household accounts—poor pa has to do them after he comes from the city—and you'd have to darn our stockings. We can't bear the way Bridget darns them. They hurt our heels. Pa says you can do it the German way and make the darn look just like the stocking. You showed my ma how to do it."

"Yes, Dickey, I did."

"And you showed her how to make mead from the honey-comb, and pa says it is a lovely drink; you'll make some for us, won't you? And oh! Miss Clara won't you give me these bricks when you marry pa?"

"No, Dickey, I shall never give them to anybody. Papa sent for them to England when I was younger than you, and taught me to play with them. I shall never part with them."

"But you'll let me play with 'em every day, when you're my ma?"

"What would you like for tea to-night?" said Miss Clara evading the bricks question.

"Honey and peach jam," returned Dickey, promptly.

"Both would make you sick; chose which you'll have."

"Peach jam," said Dickey, after a thoughtful pause, "and you'll crack the stones."

"I will. Do you love me a little bit, Dickey?"

"I guess I do a great deal," was the reply.

"You will never give me up—you will always come to see me if papa will let you?"

"I'd come if he wouldn't. I'd run away. I'd go miles to play with these nice little bricks."

Clara shrugged her shoulders. "You are your father's own son; a boy after his own heart," and when the little man was busy with his meal she opened her letter. Thus it ran:

Dear Clara: We have known each other a long time and there's no need of formality between us. I have no doubt you often feel lonely now your father's gone and wish for a husband (and very natural too) and I want a wife, so I think we had better make a match of it. We could be a mutual benefit to each other. I know nothing of your father's will, but I am willing of course to settle your property strictly on yourself and your children (if any) after you. Don't send your answer by Dickey, as I shall be away till Saturday, but address to my place of business. You have known me so long that all things considered, there can be but one answer I think, so I'll sign myself what I hope I am, your affectionate future husband, James Thompson.

Unutterable scorn sat upon Clara's features as she read this letter. She did consult cousin Jack this time, or even mention the matter to him; about this lover—if he can be called one—she had no doubt, but sat down on the instant and wrote in her clearest hand:

Sir,—I have received your proposal, and as you say there can be but one answer and that is no. I decline the intended honor and am sir,

Yours truly,
Clara Montgomery.

Mr. Thompson rubbed his eyes when he had read the note and read it again.

"She can never be such a fool as to refuse me in earnest," he said to his brother; "impossible. But women are fools one and all, they like to be palavered and made love to, and precious little time a man of business has for that. Still she's a handsome woman, and it's as well to humor her till the knot is tied, and then there must be an end of this nonsense. As you are going that way Tom, you might call and leave a boquet with my love. It's thawing rapidly, and the flowers wont freeze in carrying. They're precious dear at this season, that's the worst of it, get the cheapest, I suppose it will cost a dollar. There are four more orders to fill, and then you may go."

Clara returning from a walk was over taken by this messenger of Cupid at her own gate. He checked his horse and lifted his hat with a smirk of recognition.

"My brother desired me to give you these flowers with his love," he said.

"I decline to take them," said the lady frigidly. "Has your brother received my letter?"

"Yes, he has, Miss Clara, and he felt very much hurt and cut up, I assure you," he answered, still extending the boquet.

"I will not take those flowers, Mr. Tom."

"Why, what shall I do with them?"

"Anything you please, sir. I wish you good afternoon," and making him a superb bend, she walked in at her own gate and closed it. Mr. Tom, though a less practical man than his brother, did not like to waste a dollar, so he took the flowers home and put them in water, and when James returned he pointed to them and said briefly, "she wouldn't have them." An arbitrary feeling akin to that which burned in the breast of the Mulrooney, made Mr. Thompson utterly unwilling to take no for an answer; an obstinacy, a determination not to be beaten, but to force a way to his end, had carried him through many a difficulty.

"I will go up and talk to her," he said, and after dinner he went.

Miss Clara had been playing the evening hymn, and "Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost" carolled out in her sweet, powerful young voice, greeting Mr. Thomson as he opened her gate. What then was his surprise, when Briggs answered his question at the door with a prompt "not at home, sir."

"She is at home; what do you mean by telling me such a falsehood?" asked Mr. Thompson sharply.

"It's no more a falsehood for me to say she's not at home, than for you to ask if she was at home when you knowed it all the time," returned Briggs coolly. "She don't feel like company, for she told me so, and don't want to be bothered with them as 'ad better be at home. As you like truth, sir, that's the truth exact for you."

"Come, stand aside, woman, I must see your mistress; I have special business with her," said Mr. Thompson, who was much given to bullying in his own warehouse, and felt his temper rising. "You forget who you are, and who you're speaking to. Let me as."

"I'm speaking to James Thompson, as never owned a bacre of land in Hingland, and come to Canada without a cent," returned Briggs, speaking rapidly and without any regard to comma's; "and you're a speaking to Martha Briggs, as was born in a good brick house wi' fourteen rooms in it, for my feyther lived on his own land and his feyther before him, and his grandfeyther, aye, and his great-grandfeyther, and beside the house and barn there was a wash'us, brewus, as well as a pig stye, a duckus, a bakens and a dog kenuel; and my feyther always had a good broadcloth coat, wi' a gold piece in his pocket, and lived on the best o' beef and beer, and I'm a woman as has always wore a good gown and had a change o' clean sweet wholesome linen every week, and some o' your unbleached calico, for I wouldn't be seen in it, and lived upon the best o' vittles ever since I was born, a 'ighly respectable woman that's who you're speaking to James Thompson, and the old master if he was pulled out o' his grave 'ud say the same, for he ordered me a good black gown because he respected me, a woman as can do the sample as well as any lad, though I says it as shouldn't——"

"Let me pass woman, I have had enough of this insolence, and more than enough," said Mr. Thompson, recovering from the flood of eloquence, which had well nigh swamped him; and his blood was thoroughly up. "I will see your mistress."

"When she wishes it and not afore, hi! Sally, the mop quick, the wet 'un, when Miss Clara says she's at home she is at home, and when she says she isn't she isn't at 'ome. Brutus, here, here," exclaimed Briggs grasping the door firmly and preparing for war. Now Brutus was a cross between a mastiff and a bull dog, and had a spirit and will of his own as well as Briggs and Mr. Thompson; he came at her call slowly, but bristling his back and growling, Sally also arriving at the same instant with a wet mop and a broad grin on her face, and Jack Montgomery cantering up at this juncture, their combined forces recalled Mr. Thompson to his senses and he beat a hasty retreat. Still angry and unwilling to be beaten, he went to his aunt, Mrs. Montgomery, to enlist her sympathies, but she did not back him up as he hoped, having as we know other views for Clara.

"Women are queer creatures," she said, "and full o' whims, and when it comes to marrying, James, why one is pretty much the same as another. I'd try somebody else, no fear of your getting a wife and if she isn't as pretty as Clara, maybe she won't be so spirited."

"Aunt Sarah," said Mr. Thompson solemnly, "there's no excuse for a woman of thirty refusing a good offer; it's flying in the face of Providence, and take my word for it evil will come to Clara.

This remark tickled Mrs. Montogomery's sense of humor, and she repeated it to Jack, who received it with a roar of laughter, and repeated it to his friend Gustavus Adolphus Browne who said "upon my word these old fellows beat all for cheek," and in his turn repeated it to Mr. Jackson, who told his wife, who shouted it into the ear of deaf old Mr Danton, when she called to sympathize with him about his gout, and he being very deaf, quite misunderstood the point of the story, and repeated it to his wife with strange variations. Meanwhile Dickey who loved a bit of gossip repeated it to her maid Judy, who told her aunt Mrs. Mary Mulligan, who told Mrs. Bridget Cassiday, who meeting Mr. Patrick Mulrooney returning from the air told him—what? "Miss Clara is to be wedded to Misther Thompson on the last day of March that's coming on, as I'm a living woman and God's above us all, the Vargin protict her, and sorrow go wid him that I should say so, for the manest hatchet faced man that ever sould iron wid a heart as hard as its self, and howiver she tuck him I can't conceive, wid six bould children ready made, an' that's me news Paterick Mulrooney an' the divil a lie in it, and sorry I am to tell it, but Heaven's above all."

Chapter V.

One crowded hour of glorious life
Is worth an age without a name."
—Old Ballad.

Mrs Cassidy's story roused the latent fire of jealousy in the breast of the Mulrooney and put him to torture, and he was obliged to take copious draughts of a liquor called "old Allen"—very popular in Canada—to keep his spirits up. This cordial, taken in connection with another spirit which he and others call the spirit of liberty, but I call the misused power of the press, roused Mr. Mulrooney to madness, and ripened his passions for any rash and wicked deed. That Father McGrath had a great and good influence with his congregation cannot be doubted, but his power was a feather weight against the mighty force of the local newspaper and "old Allen" combined. The local newspaper was Mr. Mulrooney's sole mental food; he took no other; that and a quack almanac were the only literature he ever indulged in. He was by no means deficient in the power of reasoning, and had the mental quickness peculiar to his nation, and the newspaper soon taught him how he might gain the beautiful Clara, and distinguish himself forever at the same time. Having studied his paper for years, and learnt through its medium the spirit of the times, he knew—who does not?—the peculiar tenderness which Canadians, as a nation, exhibit towards criminals. Let a man commit a murder, and he is at once a subject of the greatest interest, but let him perpetrate some nameless and shocking outrage at the same time, which is almost or entirely worse than murder, and he is the hero of the day; then let him profess penitence and say his heart is broken, and the public are delighted with him, his popularity is complete. The papers teem with the history of the crime in all its minutiæ—that of course—but that is not all. We have his history, his early piety and how he fell, anecdotes are related of him, phrenologists feel his head, and doctors examine it to see if there is a crack in it experts, often being brought from a great distance for that purpose, the public paying their expenses.

He is placed in a very comfortable cell, he is fed on the finest butchers' meat, the sweetest of bread—the authorities are careful and particular on this point—pleasant books are provided to calm his mind, he sees the morning and evening papers, tracts are showered upon him by benevolent ladies, the best criminal lawyer in the Dominion is paid a monstrous sum for defending him. If his friends are too poor to pay for counsel, and the criminal has the misfortune not to belong to the noble order of Free Masons, Orangemen or Fenians, why the great large hearted, wrong headed public steps into the gap and provides a defender. If he belongs to any of these orders, the expenses of his trial are paid by the fraternity. The jury generally takes the popular (*i. e.* crooked) view of the case, and acquits him, but if the judge's charge is so severe that his countrymen have to condemn him, they do it with a recommendation to mercy. Instantly a petition is set on foot and signed by thousands, and his sentence is commuted from ten years to five. He is taken to Kingston and taught a trade, little accounts of him appear from time to time to keep the public interest alive. He writes to his family and the letters are published and copied from one paper to another. Another petition. His sentence is still further shortened, finally he is liberated, returns to the bosom of his family, is received with open arms and a kind of ovation. At the time of our story a case of peculiar interest was filling all the papers, a case of abduction, and no one watched the result with a keener attention than Mr. Mulrooney, for the lady was of high rank and well connected and had been treated with peculiar brutality. The local papers were, of course, in favor of the criminal, to whom the lady had been engaged, but who had actually broken off the match because the poor fellow drank more of "old Allen" than she approved A very light sentence was given the prisoner, who left his native city for Kingston amid the cheers and tears of the crowd. Miss Montgomery was not related to a sheriff or a judge, as this lady was, had apparently no protector but a fat boy of eighteen. This lady had shown great courage. Miss Clara he felt sure was a coward; she trembled