



A DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE.

BY SOPHIE BRONSON TITTERINGTON.

It's a good many year since the Britishers found out that the folks on this side of the water meant business when they set up for themselves. Other folks since then has hed to declare independence, and fight fur it, too. I've got a story to tell along that line.

It all come through them turkeys. The question wuz about partnership. What air pardners? Kin a man an' a woman be pardners, when the woman is pardner only when she's got somethin' worth sharin', while the man is pardner the hull livin' time? That wuz the pint that bothered me. It don't bother me now, though.

The way of it wuz this: Me an' Elnathan Jacobs hev bin married a leetle over twenty-five year. We didn't hev an acre to start on, but we rented a farm, an' by hard work, airy an' late, we got a bit ahead every year, till we bought a farm fur ourselves. Elnathan wuz stiddy an' industrious, while I wuz willin' to work, an' willin' to pinch, an' did my full share of it. Them wuz happy days, in spite of tiredness an' poverty.

Elnathan, he got so in the habit of savin' and pinchin', he didn't seem to think we could do any other way, leastwise in the house, even when we wuz puttin' money in the bank every season. He could buy farm machinery, an' fine stock, but there the spendin' stopped. We wimmen folks could do without, when conveniences wuz talked about.

But I started out to tell about them turkeys. You see, when we begun, the eggs an' chickens an' butter went to the store fur groceries an' clothes. That wuz all we had to buy 'em with, an' I wuz glad to do that way. As we got forehanded, I felt as if I ort to hev the chicken an' egg money, seein' as how I tuk all the care of the chickens. Malviny—she's our darter, an' a mighty purty, clever one, if I do say it as ortn'to—wanted leetle fixin's sech as other girls hed. The young fellers liked to shine up to her, an' I didn't blame 'em a mite, but she wuz that proud-spirited she wouldn't ax 'em into our parlor, it wuz so bare an' old-fashioned.

"I wouldn't care, ma," she said, "ef pa wuz poor, an' couldn't afford anythin' better. But everybody knows he is makin' money, an' I'm ashamed to hev folks see sech a lookin' room."

"Why, Malviny," says I, more to comfort her than anythin' else, fur I wuz a good deal of her way of thinkin', "the parlor carpet wuz new two year ago, an' it's real bright an' cheerful lookin'. It's got some of your Grandma Jacobs' dresses in it, a strip of your Great-aunt Jane's apron, an' a scrap of my weddin' dress. I should think you'd put considerable store by it."

"Pshaw, ma!" she spoke up, "I don't think much of puttin' the relics of our ancestors' clothes under foot to be walked on. There's some sense in puttin' 'em into a quilt, but not into a rag-carpet. They're all right in their place, an' real homelike, but not in the parlor."

Now this made me feel powerful bad. I telled Elnathan about it that night, an' begged him to let me buy a store carpet fur the parlor.

"Foolish pride! foolish pride!" he said. "Why, that carpet is nice enough for anybody. I want to buy that quarter-section of Baker, an' won't have no money to spend on gim-cracks. Malviny will be glad enough if I can leave her an' Jim each a nice pair of shoes."

I knowed it wa'n't no use to say any more, but I did a mighty lot of thinkin'. If Malviny could hev a pleasant home an' nice company while she wuz young an' lively, 'twould do more fur her than a farm when the bloom an' joy she missed out of her life hed made her old, an' soured, an' lonesome.

Then another thing happened. We went to church in Jacobsville when it wuzn't too cold, or too warm, or the horses hedn't been workin' too hard. The wimmen hed a sewin' society, an' I hed bin to it oncet or twicet, an' liked it very much. But one day, in the fall, the parson's wife, she said to me, says she:

"Sister Jacobs, some of us has bin a talkin', and wishin' we could hev the Society out at your place, some time. We love to go into the country oncet in a while."

I wuz struck all in a heap. This wuz wuss an' more of it. I could jest see that parlor, so different from the other parlors where I hed been to Society. There it wuz, in my mind's eye, with the rag-carpet on the floor, the wooden cheers, an' the old wooden rocker we kept in there to help fill up, an' 'cause it wuz so hard an' straight we didn't like to set in it.

"Sister Taylor," says I, "I ain't jest fixed fur the Society yet. Wait a while, an' I shall be very glad to hev ye all come."

"All right," she said, in a pleased sort of way, an' begun talkin' about somethin' else.

Now, as I told you afore, I hed lived with Elnathan Jacobs fur twenty-five year, an' in all that time I hedn't once fairly made up my mind. It wuz his mind that wuz allers made up, so to speak. But now I wuz that riz up, I determined that things hed got to be different. That parlor wuz goin' to hev a new carpet, an' new furniture, an' lace curtains, like what I hed seen at Society. There was goin' to be a new set of dishes, too, an' whatever wuz needed to make a table look nice. Elnathan wuz a good provider in the eatin' line, 'cause his own stumick wuz very dear to him. I knowed if I hed the dishes, I could set as good a table fur the Society as they'd find any-where.

I rode my high horse of determination home, though I purty nigh tumbled off in wonderin' how I wuz goin' to carry out all my fine plans. But I grit my teeth an' stamped my foot an' said to myself, "Sary Ann Jacobs, you've got to do it, or die. You've passed your word to the parson's wife, an' Malviny's frettin' her soul out, an' that's got to be stopped. Jim's our boy—we've only got the two children—an' he's good to his mother. He's eighteen year old, an' his pa's kept him at work, an' give him mighty little money. You'll git all the more in the end," he telled him, as if that wuz much comfort to a lively lad! So Jim couldn't help me much, but it wuz a comfort to talk it over with him, an' he wuz right in fur doin' all he could.

"See here, ma," he says, "I wuz over to Mis' Haines this mornin', an' her hired girl has gone off an' left her. She's weakly, you know, an' she says to me, 'Jim, if I could only git your mother to bake my bread, I b'lieve I could manage.' You've got too much to do now, ma, but it would be a chance to alrp somethin'."

"I'll do it," I said. "You git up the old mare, an' I'll go right over. Malviny kin git supper."

Mis' Haines wuz orful glad to hear that I would make her bread. Fur my bread is known all over Hawkins County. Calm facts is not boastin'. In makin' the bargain, I wuz keef-ful.

"Now, Mis' Haines," I says, "I want you to furnish the flour. I'll make the bread an' biscuit jest as you want them, but it will be out of your flour, not mine."

She looked a leetle surprised, but she agreed to it, an' to the price I axed her. You see, I wa'n't goin' to hev any pardner-

ship mixed up in this dicker. If we hed furnished the flour, Elnathan wuld hev wanted his pay, an' my share wuld hev bin slim. Well, it worked fust-rate. I made Mis' Haines' bread all winter, an' by spring hed quite a good many dollars hid away in an old chany pitcher on the north-east corner of my top pantry shelf. Elnathan wuld ax once in a while if Mis' Haines kept me paid up fur my work, but all the answer he got wuz that we hed fixed that between us.

I knowed that bread-makin' alone wuld'n't airn near enough money to get half what I needed. Before this, I hed tried time an' time agin to coax Elnathan to buy good stock to improve our poultry. Our old hens were small an' runty, a poor lookin' lot. But he never wuld spend a cent fur anythin' better, although he paid fifty dollars fur jest one pig. He sed a hen wuz a hen, an' you couldn't make nothin' else out of her. He didn't seem to see the same reason wuld apply to a pig or a cow. He said eggs sold fur the same whether they wuz small ones or big ones, an' one kind of hen laid jest as well as another. Wimmen folks wuz allers easy imposed upon. Fowls wuz bragged up to sell high, when they wuzn't worth any more than common stock. If the hens wuz small, set more eggs, an' fry more of 'em at a time.

I knowed he wuz wrong, fur Mis' Haines wuz tellin' me of how much money her darter Sally, who married an' went near a big town, wuz makin' out of her poultry. She hed two kinds. Mis' Haines said—one small kind, they jest shelled out the eggs in the winter, when they wuz high, an' a big kind to sell fur market. She kept 'em apart all the time. Then her turkeys wuz profitable too. She made two hundred dollars jest on turkeys the fall I begun makin' bread fur Mis' Haines. They wuz a big kind, an' she made lots by sellin' eggs at high prices for other folks to set.

Turkeys! They wuz what I would hev. In the spring I would send fur settin's of eggs from Sally Haines. I didn't ask Elnathan, fur, mind you, this wuzn't no pardnership affair.

Through Mis' Haines, who went to Sally's visitin', I got a lot of eggs; not jest turkey eggs alone, but of big chickens too. I took jest as good care as common of the farm fowls—the pardnership ones—yes, more than common, an' it seemed as if they never done so well. There wuz plenty of eggs fur the grocery bill an' lots an' lots of chickens.

The hens that sot on my fine eggs, that I paid my bread money fur, did well too. I hed them out in the orchard, 'way off from the rest. Elnathan didn't know a thing about it till he saw the little turkeys runnin' around. Then he didn't object, 'cause he thought they would bring in more pardnership money. I didn't say nothin' to the contrary fur the time, fur I didn't want an argumint lastin' all summer. One, short an' meanin', wuz enough.

I hed good luck all the season, an' the turkeys an' chickens in the orchard wuz somethin' to be proud of. Thanks-givin' time I hed a lot of turkeys an' big roosters to sell. Elnathan wanted to take them to town fur me, but I telled him I would take them myself. Then he said:

"I'll go with you, Sary Ann, 'cause I want the money fur the next payment on Baker's land."

"Where's the cattle an' hogs you was goin' to sell?" I axed.

"Oh, I'm nct quite ready to sell, an' when I am, that kin go in the bank toward what I am layin' by fur a rainy day."

The time hed come. The clock of Destiny hed struck, an' I struck too. I wuz calm outside, fur I wuz battlin' fur duty an' justice—duty to Malviny, an' my own rights to my own airmin's.

As I said, I wuz calm outside, but inside I wuz worked up to the pint that I felt I could be eloquent an' convincin'. Leastways, I wuz determined that afore I got through Elnathan Jacobs should be convinced that the wife of his buzzon meant business.

He wuz a settin' in his rockin' cheer, with the hen-feather cushion in it he likes so well, while I towered over him in my consciousness of right.

"Elnathan," says I, "them turkeys an' chickens in the orchard are mine. You ain't got a lean-to on 'em at all. Did you make the bread that airned the money that bought the eggs? Wuz it your back that ached a kneadin' it, when you wuz all wore out with your own home work? Wuz it your hands that turned it out of the oven, light, an' white, an' sweet-smellin'? No, sir! I did it all myself, an' whatever comes from that work is a goin' down into my pocket!"

Elnathan hedn't never seen me so cantankerous. In a soft tone, coaxin' like, he said:

"Why, Sary Ann, ain't this farm our'n? Ain't your name onto the deed as well as mine? Didn't we airn it together?"

"Yes," I said in a tone that made him scringe, "we did airn it together. It wuz my hard work along with your hard work that bought it. But you allers talk of 'my farm', 'my cattle', 'my hogs.' If I ax you for a cent over what will keep us barely decent, or make home pleasant and convenient, you say you can't afford to give it to me. But you kin afford machines fur makin' your part of the work easy, you kin afford fine cattle an' hogs. You say this house is mine as well as your'n. The money the crops and stock brings is mine as well as your'n, but you keep back my share. Pardnership means both sides. Where is the cow and the six hogs my father gave me on our weddin' day? The calves an' pigs hev never brought me a cent to use as I please. You claimed them all, an' the money went where you chose to hev it go."

Elnathan opened his mouth in surprise. I couldn't help thinkin' of how the Britishers must hev felt at the Declaration of Independence. I knew very well how the colonies felt. But mine wuz jest bein' declared, an' I proceeded to go on.

"This house—mine as well as your'n accordin' to your own tellin'—is goin' to be fixed up pleasant an' comfortable. These turkeys an' chickens will do part of the fixin' up. When you sell your cattle an' hogs, the price of the best steer an' six hogs is comin' to me. After this, I will hev a share in the profits or know the reason why."

I stood there, calm as an iceberg, an' determined as an iron wedge. My noble look impressed him, as I meant it should.

"Hain't I bin a good wife?" I went on. "Hain't I done my share? Look at these hands, all rough, an' brown, an' horny. A woman works more hours in a day than a man. Hasn't she a right to a fair share of what she airns?"

I wuz gettin' sorry fur Elnathan. He looked as if an airthquake hed skaired him an' shuk him all to pieces. But I dassen't give in till I hed won the battle. I waited a minute or two, an' then axed in solemn tones:

Elnathan Jacobs, air them turkeys an' chickens mine—or your'n?

It wuz powerful hard fur him to give up. But my eye wuz on him, an' the hole it made in his feelin's kept gittin' bigger an' bigger. I stood silent, lettin' the idee work in his mind. The stillness worried him, fur he wriggled wuss than ever, an' the clock ticked so loud it seemed to be sayin': "Mine—your'n! Mine—your'n!"

At last he stopped wrigglin', an' a pleasant look stole into his face. He got up out of his cheer, an' come up to me an' said so soft-like that it sounded like the Elnathan that courted me twenty-five year ago.

They ain't your'n, Sary Ann, an' they ain't mine; they're our'n. The farm, an' the house, an' the cattle, an' the hogs, an' the money in the bank—they're all our'n. You shall hev a check-book, Sary Ann, an' draw what you want any time. I kin trust you. An' if you will believe it, he up an' kissed me!

I'm goin' to hev the Sewin' Society next week. Malviny has company in the parlor every Sunday night, an' it looks as if Frank Haines would claim her one of these days. The old clock-ticks away, but it doesn't say "Mine—your'n" any more. It says in a softer way, "All—our'n!" I think it's lots better than to hev things mine an' his'n.

Perry Patettic (in the road)—W'y don't you go in? De dog's all right. Don't you see him waggin' his tail? Wayworn Watson (at the gate)—Yes, and he's growlin' at the same time. I dunno which end to believe.

A Canadian Girl in Dresden.

DEAR NELL,—

It seems a long time since I said good-by to you all at the Toronto station, and now that I am settled in the third étage of Frau Bohn's family pension, I shall fulfill my promise of telling you something about my journey and the life here. In the first place, Dresden is simply lovely, and I wish there was a whole year, instead of six months, to be spent in it, and two months have already slipped past.

The voyage was pleasant, but uneventful, from which you may infer that there were no nice men on board. The women passengers as a whole were "more interesting than strictly beautiful," and they were all very nice to one another—a fact which may be explained by the absence of men. There was only one really disagreeable person on board, a girlish old thing, of about fifty summers, who made the captain's life a burden with her veiled attentions. She always spoke of herself as "mercifully spared," as if matrimony were a pestilence. I heard the captain mutter something about a "bilious wasp" one day when she had been particularly attentive.

We landed at Nordenham, and took a train there for Bremen. It was my first experience of Continental traveling, and the novelty quite compensated me for any discomforts. The engine and coaches are very small, and it seems to take a dozen men, with queer little shrill whistles, to start one train, and then it goes so slowly that the guard can walk along a narrow platform outside the coaches and collect tickets through the windows! The country between Bremen and Berlin is flat, and sparsely settled, but everything is neat and regular. Even the forests have been planted in row upon row, reminding me of our own nursery gardens. The fields were being plowed as we went along. The plow was drawn by oxen, and a woman following, smoothing the ground with a rake. In every field there were about three women to one man—stunted, thick-waisted, short-skirted, unattractive females. It was a damp, cold day, and the poor creatures all looked half frozen. As a contrast, let me tell you that every cow—pretty little Holsteins—wore a nice warm blanket. They treat the old "moolies" well over here, currying and combing them as carefully as the horses. Of course, there were windmills in plenty, and dear little thatched houses, with funny windows, that seemed to say: "Oh!" But the thatched roofs are becoming rare, because they cannot be insured against fire. The first thing that struck me in the German villages was their warmth of color. The red roofs, and the good strong blue they are not afraid of using, the gay costumes, and the rich green of the tree trunks, which seemed to be all covered with moss, made a much finer picture than a Canadian village of the same size.

We stopped at Berlin over night, and though nearly midnight when we arrived, we took a walk past the Imperial palaces and up the Linden strasse before going to the hotel, where everything was very comfortable, except the beds. They use no double beds, and the covering consists of a feather mattress, which is just long enough to reach from neck to ankle, and it is very hard to decide which end of one's anatomy can best stand a chill. Fortunately, in the Bohn "pension" they conform to Western ideas of comfort, and give us bedclothes of ample length.

Alice Young, the girl who shares the étage with me, is American, very pretty, as bright as a dollar, and well endowed with the national candor. She doesn't approve of my clothes, and said the only fit about them was the fit she got when she looked at them. When I explained that they were all homemade, she said the information was unnecessary. There is no use in being angry with Alice, so I agreed that if she would give me a few hints about dress I would undertake to improve her manners. Frau Bohn lent us her "mahsheen" (bicycle)—"A mahsheen so good, oh! so lovely, a mahsheen from Herr Singer!" she explained. It was probably Herr Singer's virgin essay in the mechanical line—my legs were stiff for days after using it.

We are having fine skating in the splendid outdoor rinks. The Germans skate beautifully, though their skates are something like a "dug-out" with a steel keel. The rinks have a band pavilion in the center, and waiting rooms and beer stalls at the corners, and everyone, even tiny children, drinks the lager.

Dresden is full of historical interest, and I spend days prowling about in the quaint old narrow streets; but it would take another letter to tell you of all the lovely places I have already seen. The city was very gay at Christmas, and for a week beforehand the great market-place was occupied by a fair. Peasants flocked in from the country, and I longed for a kodak or an artist's pencil to fix the quaint, absurd costumes in my memory. You could buy anything in that wonderful fair—boots, dolls, lace, pottery, hot cakes, beer—the ever-present beer—and live stock, and hundreds of Xmas trees, ranging in size from well-grown trees down to tiny bushes, all stuck into wooden pedestals, and looking very like the dear little stiff trees we used to have in our "Noah's arks."

The small boy of the establishment—Alice says he looks as if he didn't know any more than the law allowed—is waiting to take this to the post. When I give it to him he will courtesy as if an invisible hand had struck his knees from behind.