

MISS MARTHA'S WILL

By George Munson.

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When Jim Maine went after anything he went after it tooth and nail. That was the spirit in which he went after Miss Martha Crowe's property.

Martha Crowe had had the reputation of a miser, but nobody imagined that, in addition to the cottage in which she and Miss Annie, her niece



"It Takes a Big Man to Cross My Will."

by marriage, dwelled, she had nine thousand dollars in the bank, the fruit of hoarding and clever investment. And the will that old Maine produced gave him everything except the cottage and the land on which it stood.

It was Annie's engagement to Tom Claffin that provoked the old woman's rage. Annie had been a drudge ever since her aunt adopted her at the age of ten, fifteen years before. No-

body had thought that the plain, quiet girl would ever marry. But Claffin, the young lawyer, saw underneath the plain exterior—saw the heart of gold and the sterling character and loving nature, long subdued and repressed, but not killed. Annie had longed to lavish her tenderness on the crabbed old woman—then, after years of vain effort to win her love, Tom had come along and claimed her.

When the miserly old woman heard of it she expressed herself in characteristic fashion.

"Not one penny of my money will you get, you ungrateful child, if you leave me in my old age," she said.

"But, aunt, we want you to make your home with us," protested the girl.

That only fanned the old woman's wrath. She sent for Maine. He was her only friend. He was an elder in some primitive tabernacle, and Miss Martha belonged to it. The congregation were narrow fanatics; self-righteous Pharisees who thought all human love an abomination.

"You'd best stay with your aunt and give that Claffin fellow the shake," leered old Jim. He was the richest man in the village and had a reputation for graspingness. Little got through his fingers.

The pair of them stormed at the girl until she fled to her room in terror. She had hoped to escape into a larger world with her marriage to Tom; but the plea of duty to her aunt broke her resolution. She gave him up.

At least, she would have given him up, only, the week following, her aunt died suddenly. She died in the midst of one of those scolding fits that made the girl's life gall and wormwood. And then Tom came and put his arms around Annie and told her that she was his, just the same, and that he had taken no notice of her letter, because he knew.

That was just like Tom. He always understood. And they meant to be very happy together. But Tom was