

MOTHER'S BOYS.

Yes, I know there are stains on my carpet,  
The traces of small muddy boots;  
And I see your fair tapestry glowing,  
All spotless with blossoms and fruits.

And I know that my walls are disfigured  
With prints of small fingers and hands,  
And that your own household most truly  
In immaculate purity stands.

And I know that my parlor is littered  
With many old treasures and toys;  
While your own is in dimtest order,  
Unharmd by the presence of boys.

And I know that my room is invaded  
Quite boldly all hours of the day;  
While you sit in yours unmolested,  
And dream the soft quiet away!

Yes, I know there are four little bed-sides  
Where I must stand watchful each night;  
While you can go out in your carriage,  
And flash in your dresses so bright.

Now, I think I'm a neat little woman;  
I like my house orderly too;  
And I'm fond of all dainty belongings,  
Yet would not change places with you.

No! keep your fair home with its order,  
Its freedom from bother and noise;  
And keep your own fanciful leisure—  
But leave me my four noble boys!

—Boston Commonwealth.

THE MAN OF THE HOUSE.

BY PANSY.

(Author of "Mrs. Noteman Smith Looking On.")

CHAPTER XXII.

REUBEN TAKES A NEW STEP.

There was not time to answer Beth; for there came a stream of light just then, from a new lamp, and behind it were mother and Miss Hunter; and Reuben poked the fire, and added a fresh lump of coal, and the room looked lovely and cheery. He was glad of the interruption, for in truth he had no answer ready. Beth's ideas of the Christian life were very startling. Was it to be supposed that he, Reuben Watson Stone, could read in the Bible and pray before people?

What did Beth mean by saying "they always did it?" Could she be right in thinking that because he was a Christian he must take up such duties as those?

"Well," said Miss Hunter briskly, setting down the new lamp on a gay lamp-mat that she had fished from her box of treasures, "how did Sunday-school go? Did you like it, Beth?"

"Some," said Beth absently, and then rousing herself: "Why, yes, ma'am; I liked it very much." She was still thinking of Reuben's wonderful news.

"Miss Hunter," said Reuben, his thoughts suddenly turned in a new channel, "do folks that sign a temperance pledge have to stop drinking cider?"

"Well, now, my boy, that depends on the kind of pledge they sign; there are some wily-washy pledges I've seen, which left cider out, but why they should be more than I can understand. Why? Was that in your Sunday-school lesson?"

"No'm," said Reuben with a little laugh, "not exactly, but something came up about promises and pledges, and we got on to it, and somehow, one of the boys said that cider belonged in the pledge, and another boy said it didn't; he said he had been a member of a temperance society for two years, and that he drank as much cider as he wanted; and they had quite a talk about it."

"And what did the teacher say?"

"Well, she didn't say a great deal about it; I guess she thought it wasn't in the lesson, and she wanted to get the boys to tend to that; but I don't believe she thinks much of cider."

"I'll warrant she doesn't; not if she is a good teacher, and knows much about boys. Why, Reuben, one of the worst drunkards I ever knew, learned to drink by sucking cider out of his father's barrel, through a straw! The idea of leaving it out of a pledge, when those who know say that it will intoxicate quicker than beer!"

but that new cider such as he drank, wouldn't hurt a cat."

"No more it wouldn't," said Miss Hunter dryly, "because a cat knows enough not to touch it. I'll tell you what I think about sweet cider; I think it is just a snare of Satan time and again he has got hold of a boy by making him so fond of sweet cider that he couldn't let it alone; and he knows it. Satan is real sharp, I tell you. Then there's another thing, Reuben: you must ask your boy who drinks as much sweet cider as he wants, if he has studied the thing up as he knows just when it changes, so that there is a little bit of alcohol in it. The fact is, that change comes a great deal sooner than most folks think. I've heard them that know say that sweet cider was really the flattest tasting stuff in the world; and that nobody liked it until the change had begun in it that makes alcohol; I should think that was stepping pretty near the edge of a promise, even if my pledge didn't say anything about sweet cider."

"I should think so too," declared Reuben. "I hadn't thought about it before, and I couldn't tell which side I was on; but I guess I'll let cider alone."

"Why, Reuben, you don't belong to any temperance society?" This from Beth, in an inquiring tone.

"No, but I'm going to. There's a fellow in the shop going to get all the signers he can to the pledge, and I told him to-day, I'd sign the first thing to-morrow."

"That's right," was Miss Hunter's hearty commendation. "And is it a cider pledge! If it isn't, I'd have another line added and poke it in somehow; for I tell you it works more mischief to young folks than all the other drinks put together. I've watched it. Boys, and girls too, that have been brought up to do right, and be what they called temperance people, go on drinking their cider year after year, and every year they like it a little harder, though they don't say so; all they say is, 'seems to me this cider tastes kind of flat; it's a little too new; it wants to stand a while.' And the first thing they know, the harder it is the better they like it; and they like it so well they can't let it alone. Some of them do, you know; it doesn't affect everybody that way, of course; if it did, people would see the danger easier. But how are you going to know but you will be the very one to learn to like it too well?"

"And even if you don't, maybe the boy that stands next you will be the one to, and maybe he would let it alone if you would." This was Reuben's comment.

"Exactly so, my boy; do you see that cider is put into the pledge that you sign?"

"I will," said Reuben.

Then suddenly Mrs. Stone started a new train of thought:

"There is something about this room makes me think of my old home; I can't tell what it is, not where it is, but the minute I get into it I think of the house we used to live in when I was a little girl, and especially the sitting room where we used to sit on Sundays."

"Well, now," said Miss Hunter with hearty sympathy in her voice, "isn't that pleasant! I do think it is so nice to have something to remind us of our childhood. You must have had a real nice home if this reminds you of it, for I do think this is about as pleasant a room as I ever saw. And what did you use to do on Sunday nights when the twilight was coming on?"

Both Reuben and Beth turned interested faces on their mother, and waited for the answer; they knew very little about her old home; she had never seemed fond of talking about it.

"Oh, we used to sing," she said, speaking slowly, as if it were hard work to go back to that long-ago past. "There was quite a family of us once, and we were all singers: Reuben and Kate were first-rate singers—they were the two youngest—and father used to say they could earn their living with their voices; but they didn't need to earn a living; they both died before they found out what a hard thing it was to live. Father had enough and to spare in those days." And then Mrs. Stone gave the sort of weary sigh that Reuben and Beth were well acquainted with. Miss Hunter didn't want her to sigh.

"So they went to heaven to sing?" she said briskly, almost gaily. "Well, there's a pleasant side to that to look back on, I'm sure. Those things most always seem so sad when they first come. I've had them

when it seemed to me I never in the world could feel it was for the best. 'I'll believe it,' says I, 'because the Lord says so,' and I used to tell him that on my knees; but as for realizing it, I don't think I ever can, not till I get to heaven." And if you believe it, I've gone to him on my knees and told him since, that I saw it as plain as day about those very things; they were best! Well, I suppose after the singing was done, somebody used to get out the old Bible and read, and then the father prayed; wasn't that the way of it?"

Mrs. Stone caught her breath hard for a moment, then in a lowered voice said: "Yes, it was; my old father never used to neglect that."

They were, right back to the subject that had put Reuben in such a whirl! This was great news to him: he had never heard so much about his grandfather before. Then his mother used to belong to a home where the Bible was read every Sunday evening, at least. He wondered if it was on other evenings: he wished he knew, but he did not like to ask his mother. At this point in his thoughts his eye caught Beth's; she nodded her head, and her face said almost as plainly as words could have done:

"I told you so; grandfather was a Christian, you see, and he read in the Bible and prayed."

"But then he was a man!" said Reuben to himself.

"Well, what of that?" asked the other self who often in these days held conversations with him. "So will you be a man if you live long enough; and you are the only man there is to this house now. You have to help pay the rent, and buy the coal, and do ever so many things now that you wouldn't if you had a father. As likely as not you would be in school instead of working hard every day to support your family; why should you wait until you get to be a man before you read in the Bible and pray in your family, any more than you wanted until then to do other things?"

"Mother might not like it," said Reuben. "You will never know till you see her," said the other self; "and you know you don't believe but what she will like it, or at least, that she won't find any fault with it; she hardly ever finds fault with anything that you do."

"Maybe I'll do it next Sunday," said Reuben.

"I should think it would be a great deal more sensible to do it now," said his other self; "things don't grow easy by waiting; you know that, for you've tried it. In fact, this first Sunday in a new home, when everything is beginning over new in your family, is just the easiest time you will ever have. If I were you, I'd do it this very night. Your mother doesn't know, be sure, that you have become a soldier, but Beth does, and you see what she expects of you as at any time. You wondered how you should ever have a chance to show your colors; are you going to shirk the very first chance?"

But at this point Reuben gave up the sort of thinking which consists in just holding an argument with one half of yourself against the other half, and set himself to right down earnest thinking. The talk went on in the room, but he did not hear it. He had an important question to settle. It seemed strange to him that Beth, who was not a soldier at all, had been the one to rouse him to duty, and even point the way; but the more he thought about it, the more sure he felt that she was right, and that there was a chance to stand by his colors. It seemed like very hard work to him; you boys who have been in the habit of reading a few verses in the Bible with your mother, and then kneeling with her in prayer every night and morning of your lives, will probably never be able to understand how hard it was. But there was this about Reuben that made every one who knew him believe in him, and believe that he would make a man to be trusted. When he saw a plain duty he never shirked it because it was hard. He did not mean to shirk this one.

"Mother," he said, breaking into the midst of something that Beth was saying, being so intent on what he was about to say, that he had not heard Beth at all, and the earnestness sounded so plainly in his voice, that his mother turned toward him an expectant face and waited: "Mother, I've had something to tell you for a week, but I haven't got it told. I've become a soldier,

and I've got to stand by the colors all the time."

"A soldier!" repeated Mrs. Stone, in a kind of dismayed voice. This boy of hers had so astonished her lately that she was prepared for almost anything. Had he told her there was war with the Indians and he must march away the next morning, I don't know that she would have been much more bewildered than that she was now. It was plain that she did not understand him any better than Beth had, and it was equally plain that Miss Hunter did. Her eyes flashed a bright light at him, that made his heart feel warm, and he answered her smile, and then turned to his mother.

"Yes, mother, a soldier of the Lord Jesus. I'm bound to serve him all my life; and since I'm all the man of the house there is, I was wondering if you would care if I read some verses in the Bible and prayed, as grandfather used to do. I never knew before that grandfather did so."

For the next minute or two it was so still in that little new room that you could hear your own heart beat, I think. Then Mrs. Stone said, and her voice was so low that Reuben had to bend his head to hear it: "Of course I wouldn't care, Reuben, if you want to."

Without another word, Reuben reached for the Bible that he had been studying but a little while before, and read aloud the words over which he had been thinking that afternoon. "Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men who shall be able to teach others also. Thou therefore endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth, entangleth himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier."

There was a great deal about these verses that Reuben did not understand; indeed they had caught his eye because the word soldier was repeated several times, and then that last sentence about pleasing him who had chosen him to be a soldier gave him joy; Reuben was sure of this, that he wanted nothing now so much as a chance to please Jesus. During this reading he was much troubled as to what he should say when he knelt to pray. Remember, he had never heard his own voice in prayer, and indeed I may say he had rarely heard anybody pray. But he was much astonished to discover that words seemed to come to him without any trouble. Only a few simple sentences, but they expressed as plainly as words could, his resolution to belong to the Lord Jesus, and to serve him in all things as well as he could from that time forth.

He felt very happy when he rose from his knees; somehow he could not help feeling more like a soldier than before; as though he had put on his uniform, you know; besides, there had been something in his mother's voice, low and husky though it was, which made him feel that she did not dislike the reading and praying. She had knelt very near to him and he felt sure he had heard her crying. Perhaps she was thinking of grandfather; perhaps she had missed his prayers very much. And Reuben resolved that she should never miss prayers again. It hardly needed Miss Hunter's happy sentence, "Well now, I thank the Lord that I belong to a family altar once more," to make him feel that he had done the right thing, and that God would bless him in it.

CHAPTER XXIII. THEIR FIRST PARTY.

There was a good deal of excitement one evening in the new house where the Stone family lived. Something very interesting had happened. Beth and Reuben were invited out to spend the evening, for the first time in their lives. You boys and girls who have been to a children's party, or to an entertainment of some sort, as often as once a month, ever since you can remember, will be astonished at this, but it is true. Hattie Turner, a young girl in Beth's Sabbath-school class, and her brother, who was in Reuben's class, were to have a candy pull, with plenty of apples, and nuts, and games, and a good time generally, and Beth was braiding her hair in lovely silvery braids, and tying it with blue ribbon to match her dress.

"You are too much dressed up for a candy pull, and that's a fact," her mother said,

eying the l... yet with s... in it!

Miss Hu... there was r... if she shou... off, and we... most as the... "Oh, she w... roll up her... and she h... is know, be... will do for... well."

Reuben... he looked... pants, cut j... with as ma... wore. Th... dressed up... so new, an... "She m... pantaloons... gayly, and... that she w... Reuben's... went back... they Kate... they could... question w... tone that y...

"I wore... along all... said, with... one friend... thought of... wished she... felt that w... "Could... few days... Maybe 'Tir... could, any... "Have... smiling at... pleasant i... when the... if they co... their fare... "Let's t... ding her l... a way to a... So Beth... party, the... of what ti... for their f... It was I... the side d... back for a... that she g... to Reuben... "I sup... your colo... Then B... neat gray... a dash of... that Miss... no danger... but he d... mean.

"I don... them to-... boys to p... There wo... that you... "Hum... wise," an... heard of... gether for... gave them... Why, Sat... Lord did... and actio... them that... Captain's... ward, hav... Reuber... little tab... Miss Hu... rough fe... shop; th... gentiana... will be th... any chan... "Just... don't,"... nice girls... less feet... of mine... "My son... not." H... party of... verse di... among t... better I... "Yot... it's my...