

THE MAN OF THE HOUSE.

BY PANSY.

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

CHAPTER XIII.—Continued.

"Would you like to learn the trade?" Mr. Barrows asked him, as they went down the stairs, after he had watched in silence, for half an hour, the movements of a boy who was feeding a machine for trimming the edges of the pasteboards.

"Yes, sir," said Reuben promptly. "I would."

Whereupon, Mr. Barrows said it was about time they went to look after the little house. This recalled Reuben to a sense of his responsibility as "the man of the house," and he followed, with eager steps, across the street, behind a great snow-drift, to a trim little house, set in a yard, with a great tree before the door, whose huge branches were leafless now and snow-covered, but which Reuben could seem to see dressed in green, with a bird building her nest right in front of his mother's window.

Oh, those cunning little rooms! I don't suppose you can imagine how delightful they seemed to the boy who had spent most of his life in the "north chamber." "This is the parlor," said Mr. Barrows, opening a door that led from the bit of a hall into the pleasant room, small, square, papered with a light colored pretty figured pattern, a mantle at one end, and a south window into which the sun even then was shining.

Reuben, as he gazed about him, chuckled inwardly at the idea of their having a parlor! What would Beth think of that? Besides the parlor, there was what Mr. Barrows called a dining room, and kitchen, a nice pantry, well supplied with shelves, and up stairs, three beautiful rooms, each with a clothes press.

"They are rather small, all of them," said Mr. Barrows; "but then for a small family, I should think they would do very well."

And then Reuben gazed on him in astonishment, almost in indignation. What did he mean by calling those lovely rooms small!

One—a south room—made him think of Miss Hunter, and he sighed a little. It was the one bit that he did not like about this wonderful prospect of moving, and living in a whole house, instead of one room and a clothespress—this leaving Miss Hunter, the new friend, who seemed so much like an old one.

That south room, with the bit of a bed room off, that Mr. Barrows did not count as a room at all, would be just the thing for Miss Hunter. What a wonderful thing it would be if she should take a fancy to move, too, and make gloves instead of vests! Then they might almost hope to pay the rent of this grand house! Especially as there was actually a garden and a place to keep hens, and an apple and pear tree, in the back yard! "There is a woman lives on the south side of our hall," he said, speaking some of his thoughts aloud, "she is one of the best women who ever lived; she sews on vests and things, for the tailors. If she should move here too, could she find work to do, do you think?"

"Plenty of work at making gloves and mittens. There isn't much call for women tailors in this direction; but she can make better wages at gloves than she can at tailoring. This is a good time to come here and get started. Fact is, some of the hands, a large number of them, right in the busiest season before last fall, struck for higher wages, they were getting pretty good wages too, but they thought they would like more, so they struck; and the manufacturers made up their minds that, as soon as the new year opened they would hire new hands, and get ready for the next hurrying season before it came. So they are all advertising for workers: that is what people get who aren't willing to let well enough alone."

"What is the rent of this house?" It was a quiet little question, but it took Reuben nearly ten minutes to get courage to ask it; he so fully expected to have his hopes dashed to the ground by the answer.

"Well said Mr. Barrows, meditatively, "that would depend a little on who rented it. If your mother wants it, I think I could get it for her for a hundred dollars a year."

"That's only a little over eight dollars a month," said Reuben, and his cheeks were crimson, and his eyes very bright. It actually was but a trifle more than they had

to pay every month for the north room, and the clothes press! Now, if he could but manage to earn enough to make up the difference, and have a little left to go for coal, they might try the new home!

"What could I earn in a week, do you suppose?" and Mr. Barrows could hardly help smiling over the boy's eagerness.

"Well now, my man, that would depend entirely on yourself. Some boys don't earn the salt that they eat with their potatoes; I wouldn't promise to furnish it, for all they do. Then again there are boys who earn good wages, and help their mothers right straight through. I had a boy last year who earned his three dollars a week, all through the year."

"In the box business?"

"In the box business."

"How old was he?"

"About your age; a trifle older perhaps, but what he did, he could have done just as well if he had been a year younger."

"Was he a very smart boy; smarter than I could be?" Mr. Barrows laughed. "How can I tell? No, if you mean was he a remarkable boy; he wasn't. He was just a good, faithful fellow, doing his best."

"If I should do my best, could I earn as much as that?"

"I shouldn't wonder at all."

"For how many months in the year?"

Mr. Barrows laughed. "You will make a good business man, I think," he said pleasantly. "You remember to look closely into things. Well, the season, that is the busy season, lasts for about nine months in the year. If I were you I would plan to work hard for those nine months, and go to school the other three,—and do odd jobs out of school-hours to earn your board. For nine months I think you could earn from two to three dollars a week at the box business, without any trouble, and I would give you your board for what you could do after school, during the other three months."

"I think mother will come," said Reuben, with shining eyes; and I shall tell Miss Hunter what you said about the glove business."

"All right," said Mr. Barrows. "I advertised for hands for my brother-in-law; he is a manufacturer, and he runs those little machines I was telling you about. If you say so, we will go now and see them."

So they passed out, Reuben locking the door of the neat little house, wondering much whether it could possibly be for him to lock it many times in the future. He felt in such a hurry to go and tell his mother all about it, that he was almost sorry that the last plan had been for him to spend the night at Mr. Barrows and go home by the morning train. Still, if they were really going to move, there were ever so many things that he was man enough to know needed looking after. The little machines, one of which Mr. Barrows seemed to think Beth might manage, seemed to be the next things in order.

"The queerest looking creatures he ever saw in his life!" This was the way Reuben would have described them had he been talking to his mother or Beth. They seemed too small to be called machines. A round board about the size of a barrel head, a shaft of wood about three feet long, standing upright from the centre of the barrel head, finished at the top by a brass mouth about four inches long. This mouth had rows of tiny teeth on either side, matching exactly. It opened its jaws whenever the spring at the bottom was touched, and seized, and held firmly whatever was placed in right side. Reuben watched while a pretty girl of fourteen, took a kid glove of about the size for his mother, folded it carefully across the back, made the little creature open its brass mouth and take it in, then with a fine needle and a silk thread, she went rapidly down the length of the brass mouth, putting the needle between each tooth, making a little click, clicking noise with her thumb against the brass, and doing it all so rapidly that Reuben was lost in astonishment.

When the jaws opened, and the glove was drawn out, he leaned forward eagerly to discover a long, smooth row of the daintiest stitches, somewhat like those that his mother took in shirt bosoms!

"It is beautiful!" he said, admiringly; "and how fast she did it!"

"How would the sister at home like that sort of work?" asked Mr. Barrows; and Reuben, who had not fancied the idea of setting Beth at work, for the first time began to think that perhaps such work as this might do for even Beth.

When he heard that very industrious, little girls actually earned sometimes a dollar a day, and that his mother would have no trouble in earning that sum, he said emphatically, "I know mother will move."

At last the exciting day was done. Reuben had accomplished a great deal of business. He had been to the freight depot, and learned the price of freight, and the exact way of marking it, he had learned the price of butter, and meat, and flour, and milk, and wood. In short, he had done everything that he could think of, which it seemed likely to him that a man, with a family to provide for, would have done. Mr. Barrows looked on, sometimes amused, and sometimes touched almost to tears by the small boy's thoughtful planning for mother and sister. Where he needed help he got it, but for the most of the work, Mr. Barrows left him to himself, curious to see how he would carry out his plans. "The boy has the wisest head set on his young shoulders that I ever saw in my life!" he said to his wife that evening, after Reuben had gone to bed. "He hasn't done anything wonderful either. I don't know that he is any smarter than most boys of his age; he simply has used the brains that fellows like Andrew Porter spend in mischief, to help him in supporting his family. The notion he has that he is the man of the house, and must look after the comfort of his folks, like any other man, is worth a fortune to him. I believe the boy will be a rich man, while he is a young one."

"You have taken one of your tremendous likings to him," Mrs. Barrows said, laughing. "I don't wonder. I fancy him myself; and as for Grace, she wants to teach him music and drawing right away. I hope the rest of the family are half as nice. Do you believe they will come?"

"I do if Reuben can bring it to pass; and I think he can; I put the rent of the little house at a hundred dollars. I'd have made it lower, if the boy's bright eyes hadn't been fixed on me. I knew he would suspect something; he isn't after charity. I hope I shall not be disappointed in him. If he doesn't grow up a smart, business man, as well as a good man, I shall wonder at it."

CHAPTER XIV.

IN THE BOX FACTORY.

Reuben Watson Stone sat on the side of his bed and gazed about him. There was plenty to gaze at. He had never seen a prettier room in his life. The carpet was soft and bright, the sunlight making the flowers on it glow so that it seemed to the boy as though he might stoop and pick them. He thought of his sister Beth, and wished she could see the pretty carpet and pretty furniture, and the pretty curtains and everything.

"I suppose this is me," he said to himself. "It doesn't seem as though it could be. This is just the queerest kind of a world. Just think of the things that are happening to me! Ever so many of them come into one week. I lived most ten years without any happenings, and then they all came and tumbled themselves into a week! I wonder how we'll get money to move! Mother will surely move here, when she hears of how much money I can earn, and how nice it will be for Beth. We can both go to school some. It is a splendid chance. Isn't it a queer thing now, that all these chances came because I wouldn't go to that St. Mark's saloon to sell liquor?" Mr. Barrows said he never would have thought of such a thing as bringing me home with him, if he hadn't heard about that."

There were so many wonderful things to think about, that Reuben was in danger of not getting to bed at all.

He did not feel sleepy; in fact, he told himself that he didn't believe he could sleep a wink that night.

At last, however, he heard the clock around the corner strike ten, and very much astonished at the lateness of the hour, he hurried into bed. No sooner was the gas turned out, so that all the pretty things were lost to sight, than he went to dream-land. The next morning began a new life for Reuben Watson Stone. He was to begin on that day to support his family.

Directly after breakfast—and a lovely breakfast it was!—he learned for the great box factory, eager to start all that could be learned about that wonderful business.

On the way, while Mr. Barrows talked

with a gentleman who had joined them, Reuben talked with himself:

"Here I am," he told himself, "going to begin business at last! I've been for most two years hunting something to do, and now I've got it. Not a thing that I ever hunted for, or thought of, or even heard of; but something new and beautiful. Think of learning how to make boxes! I'll make a lot of them for mother some day, if I learn how real nice. Beth would like some bright, red-trimmed ones, such as I saw yesterday. Won't it be fun to show her how to do things?"

You can see that Reuben Watson Stone thought a great deal about his mother and Beth. It was well that he felt so full of business; for if he had had time, he might have been a little out of homesick. It isn't an easy thing for a boy to be away from his mother for the first time.

In the pasting-room there were only boys at work; five or six of them, a little older than Reuben. They were covering great sheets of pasteboard with wet paper. Reuben was anxious to try his skill, and very soon had a chance.

He had dreamed in the night that he could do wonderful things in the box business. Alas for dreams! Never had he undertaken anything so dreadful. Mr. Barrows was left him in charge of a boy named Wesley, with directions that he teach young Stone just what to do. So Wesley began a series of orders about what must, and must not be done; all so rapidly given that poor Reuben was utterly bewildered.

"Won't you please go slower?" he asked at last. "I'm getting all mixed up." Then all the boys laughed loud and long, as if getting mixed up were a good joke.

"Very well," said Wesley. "I'll go as slow as a snail. First you spread a sheet of paper on the pasteboard—not on the floor, nor on the wall, but on the pasteboard. Do you understand that? Are you sure I'm not going too fast? Well, then you take the brush in your right hand, mind I say right hand, because if you take the left, it's all up with you, and you dip it in the paste. Is that plain? Sure you understand? Dip it way in, the more paste you get on the better; in fact, if you don't spread the paste on thick the first time, you spoil the whole thing; if you should take the whole tub full and pour over it afterwards, it would do no good. Well, dash in your brush, and dab on the paste, half an inch thick or less; wet every inch of the paper, then dip in your brush again and go all over it once more."

"Yesterday, when I watched you, you didn't dip it in but ones," said Reuben gravely, sure that he was being made sport of, but not knowing enough about the business to be sure how far the sport went, and where the things that he must do began.

"Oh well, I was at work at a different quality of paper; that makes all the difference in the world," said Wesley. "You mustn't judge by your eyes; if you let them rove around to look at other folks, you'll never learn how in the world. Mind what I say to you, and go ahead! When you get your paper real wet, which it over; the quicker you can do it the better, and then with this big brush smooth it down; you have to bear on with all your might, or the thing goes and wrinkles; it is a ticklish job, I can tell you."

In much fear and trembling, Reuben went to work. He could see his fellow workers giggling and nudging each other, and acting as much like wretches as they could, while Wesley stood at his elbow, talking all the time and contradicting his own directions. It was worse than driving Spunk. He thought wistfully if Mr. Barrows had only let him go in a room by himself—after watching the others for awhile—and try it, he might have done something. But there was no help for it now. He dipped the brush into the bed of paste.

"Dip lower, man," said Wesley. "What are you afraid of?"

So he dipped lower, and, though it made him shiver, brought the dripping brush to the delicate white paper. Splash, splash, splash, over the smooth surface; it reminded him of stepping with wet and muddy feet on a bank of fair morning snow. The paste lay in thick ridges all over sheet. Then he took hold of the two corners carefully, at the same time remembering his direction to be "as quick as a wink." Alas! it would not turn at all. It seemed to wilt in his hands into a soft and pulpy mass, and lie in