

THE WESTERN HOME MONTHLY.

WINNIPEG, CANADA.

VOL. X. No. 9

SEPTEMBER, 1909

THE FATHER OF HIS SON.

By INEZ HAYNES GILLMORE.



"You've come to see me about Pat, haven't you? I'm glad of that."

THE little school teacher had a sense of humor so keen that when William Payne made an important announcement in regard to Pat O'Quinn's father, she was able to

see the matter from his point of view. She realized that his unfeigned joy in the tidings he bore was only the exudation of a boy's instinctive delight in a row, not a malicious pleasure in her coming downfall. That announcement was the following, delivered in a breathless voice, the words, because of his haste, slightly run together:

"Say, teacher, Pat O'Quinn's father's comin' up to school this mornin' with Pat. He's dead mad with you. He says he's going to break your slats."

The little school teacher stared blankly for a second down into William's irradiated face, and William stared with guileless glee back into hers. But it was evident that under her absorption, she was thinking hard.

"All right, William," she said, after a long pause, "you may clean all the front blackboards and water the plants"

William set to work on the boards with a zest that threatened to dislocate all the bones in his body, and soon covered everything in sight with a fine white chalk dust. The teacher, with less ado, went about the work of arranging her desk and getting out the materials for the day's lessons. It was perceptible, however, that her mind was not in what she was doing.

It was the first year of her teaching, and her lines had fallen in difficult places: in a congested Boston school. The district was a poor one, the population largely Irish Catholic. The other teachers in the building were old. Most of them had been teaching from periods ranging from twenty-five to thirty-five years. They had become the machines that such a routine, and years of it, is bound to make of the most ambitious mentalities. They had little sympathy with her youth, and even less with the new ideas of teaching and discipline that she was gradually introducing into her work. She had not had much trouble with the children themselves, with the exception of Pat O'Quinn, but he had become a veritable thorn in her flesh. He was

idle, disorderly, insolent, and maliciously so, it seemed to her. She had tried all the tricks and devices of her slender experience to bring him into line with the rest of her well-disciplined little class, but as yet she had not succeeded. In fact, she had very definitely failed. Pat's surly insubordination had culminated yesterday, when he had refused to obey her, and she had sent him home with the admonition not to return until his mother came with him.

Pat's father was one of the local heroes. He had been a good average working man until the unlucky day dawned when in a bar-room scrap he had had the felicity to knock John L. Sullivan down. From that day onward he had lived in the fame of his great blow. He gave up his work and lived a furtive saloon existence, sinking gradually in deeper and deeper strata of idleness, unnoticed except when a sudden visit to town of the famous pugilist revived memories of the great moment and brought him into prominence again. He was, it happened, and rather unaccountably, a favorite with the famous man. During the pugilist's brief stay he lived a splendid life, moving grandly from saloon to saloon, in one day's long protracted spree.

The little teacher thought all this over, and it is not surprising that her face sobered. For a moment she wondered if she had better ask the advice of some of the older teachers in regard to the matter. But her pride came to her rescue, urging her to meet the difficulty unaided. Finally her sense of humor got the upper hand, and she smiled.

Simultaneously, a line of dimples, that lived a subsidiary existence about her mouth, flashed into prominence. She went to the closet door and looked at herself in the mirror hanging there. She was a little round person, curly and dimply, with a dewy mouth, and soft brown eyes that seemed to grow vivid when she laughed. She had no features to speak of, but to make up, her complexion was fresh, and her expression changeable. She was glad, as she surveyed herself in the scrap of looking glass, that she did not happen to be wearing her regular school uniform, that she had dressed thus early for the tea she expected to attend late that afternoon. Her brow lightened as she turned away, the little figure was so dainty in the soft

pearly-gray gown with the globe of fluffy white chiffon at its neck.

The children came into the room when the quarter-of bell rang, in the orderly way in which she had trained them, but there was an air of subdued excitement about them. They glanced eagerly at her where she stood at the hall door, watching the filing, and their sense of the importance of the things they knew was only outrivalled by the recognition of the fact that teacher was wearing some pretty new clothes. They examined her closely before they exchanged the knowing looks of their secret delight.

The nine o'clock bell rang. The class came to position, each pair of hands folded on the desk, every back as straight as if a ramrod had, without warning, been run into it. The teacher closed the door, walked deliberately to her desk, took from the row of books there her Bible, opened it and sat down. And suddenly there reverberated through the room the tattoo of a stern and commanding knock. Every child in the class jumped, although each one of them had been secretly anticipating this summons, and their unalloyed joy in the prospective row ran over every face.

The teacher went to the door and opened it.

Mr. O'Quinn was short and thick-set. He had a burly figure and burly battered-looking features. A nose, several times broken, had destroyed all his pretences to a classic profile; and linen which it is a kindly euphemism to call soiled, a skin that might be charitably described as swarthy if it had not had to accommodate itself to blond coloring, a pervading odor of whiskey and cheap tobacco put him, at once, out of the category of the well-groomed. But to her surprise, the teacher discovered at the back of all this, and in a sense apologizing for it, a pair of blue eyes that looked, if their expression had not been angry, as if they might be bluff and jovial. He was holding Pat by the shoulder, and the little teacher, translating the boy's face by means of the father's, found to her surprise that his eyes might be jolly too if they had not happened, as at the present moment, to be openly impudent in expression. He had red hair and so many freckles that further discovery in regard to his features was virtually a work of excavation. She recognized vaguely, however, that the expression that Pat's mother had once used in her presence was fairly descriptive. She had said that Pat was "the spit of his father." At the time the teacher had gathered that the similarity was not confined to physique.

She had, in consequence, not until yesterday bothered the mother again. "O'd like Miss Perry," Mr. O'Quinn commanded grandly. His utterance was a little thick, but his manner was that of one descended from kings, as indeed they were, according to Mrs. O'Quinn.

"I am Miss Perry," that lady announced composedly.

Mr. O'Quinn stared. "Shure, Oi t'ought youse was one of the little gurls in the furst class," he muttered. "I t'ought Miss Perry was another wan of thim old maids that's been here since God knows whin."

"I have only been here a year," Miss Perry conceded graciously. "you've come to see me about Pat, haven't you? I'm glad of that. Won't you come in and sit down? I shall have to open school first, and give the children something to do. Then I shall have plenty of time to talk with you."

Mr. O'Quinn's brow had darkened at the suggestion. His lower jaw was protruding in imitation of the most correct type of bulldog. Miss Perry's heart sank. She wondered if the "slats" episode was about to come off.

"Shall I send Pat to his seat?" she insinuated gently; "it was good of you to come." She looked straight into his eyes, dimpling brightly.

Mr. O'Quinn's brow cleared a little. He dropped his hand—it looked like a bunch of sausages, imperfectly separated and a mottled yellow-blue in color—from his son's shoulder. The released Pat, taking this apparently as a command, slouched into the dressing room and out to his seat; his expression that conventionally assigned to the cock of the walk. He threw himself into his chair and sank down into it, his legs sprawling out in the aisle, his hands in his pockets.

Miss Perry took no notice of this. "Won't you have a seat?" she begged her visitor, prettily.

Mr. O'Quinn assented with a grunt, and she followed in the wake of his lordly stride to the platform. He compressed his bulk into the visitor's chair. From this altitude he surveyed the class haughtily.

Miss Perry took her seat at the desk. She opened the Bible and read in her soft young girl voice, "The Lord is my shepherd." Then she said: "Take out your singing books, children. One! Two! Three!"

The fifty-six statues that were her class came to life. The one hundred and twelve hands unfolded. In a hush fifty-six blue bound books flew into the right hand corners of the desk, and one hundred and twelve hands folded themselves again.

"Page 86," Miss Perry commanded.



Tiptoeed up to Mr. Quinn and handed him her book.