

THE MAN OF THE HOUSE.

BY PANSY.

Author of "Mrs. Solomon Smith Looking On."

CHAPTER XI CONTINUED.

Considering the importance of the subject, everything was arranged quite as soon as could be expected; and it was decided that Reuben should go that very afternoon, on the four o'clock train, to take a look at his possible new home. To be sure, Mrs. Stone changed her mind ten times after Mr. Barrows left, and declared that she could not have Reuben going off alone. Why he had never spent a night away from home in his life!

"Yes I have, mother," he said, with twinkling eyes; "I spent it with a crazy horse, and a crazy man." Miss Hunter came in to hear the news, and took Reuben's side with earnestness. She had no doubt that he would have a good time, and a successful journey.

"It seems kind of a wild thing to do," the mother said, looking doubtfully at Reuben. "But then it doesn't cost anything, and perhaps he ought to know whether he could do the work they expect of him, before we make any move. We must do something. I'd like to get into the country, if I could, before another summer; and this is the first shadow of a chance I have had." So she bustled around to get him ready. You would be surprised to see what a length of time it took! The family was not used to packing. Miss Hunter lent an old-fashioned, flowered carpet-bag for him to carry his clothes, and Beth undertook to pack them. There were not so many that she had any trouble in getting them in; but grave questions came up for decision.

"Reuben," she said, turning to him as he came with his arms full of kindlings,—he had been getting ready enough to last until he came back,—“do you want to take your Bible?”

"Why, no," said his mother, "It isn't likely he will have any time to read; and it isn't worth while to make the carpet-bag any heavier than is necessary."

"But there will be a Sunday," said Reuben, "and I might want to read a chapter. I guess I'll take it. It isn't very heavy." So the little Bible was packed. Behold Reuben, by half past three, his Sunday shirt on, his carpet-bag in his arm, his good-byes in his hand, ready to bid his mother good-bye for the first time in his life.

"I'll be back in a week," he said cheerily, "and if it's all right, we'll move there—won't we? Take care of yourself, mother. If it snows, Jimmy Briggs will come and make your path. I spoke to him about it. He owes me a good turn or two; and Beth, don't you go after milk unless it is real pleasant. Jimmy Briggs said he would as soon go as not; he hasn't much to do; times are so slack. I guess I've fixed all the kindlings you'll need, and I put some coal in your bedroom, mother, so you wouldn't have to go after it. Well, good-bye." His voice choked a little over that word. Never mind if it was only for a week. He was fond enough of his mother and sister not to be ashamed at the sight of a tear over bidding them good-bye. As for Beth, she cried outright; and Mrs. Stone wiped her eyes on her apron two or three times, while she stood at the window watching her boy go down the street. Mr. Barrows was walking the platform, looking out for him, when he reached the depot; and exclaimed, as he saw him,—

"Here you are, eh? I began to think you would be left."

"No, sir," said Reuben, with the gravity and precision of a train despatcher. "There are four minutes yet, before train-time."

Whereupon, the gentleman laughed, and two other gentlemen, looking on, nodded their heads, and said, "Good business talent there." But this, Reuben did not hear. He followed Mr. Barrows, took a seat with him on the train; the engine snorted, and shrieked, and growled, and finally, having made up its mind to start, did so with a spiteful jerk that threw a small boy entirely from his seat, and they were off. Reuben's first ride on the cars! You wouldn't have known it if you had been watching him. He was very quiet and at ease. He had stood outside and watched the train off so many times that its way of starting was no novelty to him. So he gave his entire attention to the way things were managed inside. Mr. Barrows found an

acquaintance a few minutes after they left the depot, and went to talk to him. Left to himself, Reuben made good use of his time. A lady, just in front, tugged at her window to try to bring the blind down. The blind was obstinate, and would not come. The afternoon sun streamed in on the lady and made her uncomfortable, so she tried again; no use. Two or three gentlemen gazed at her in a sleepy way, but did not stir. "If I had ever seen such a concern as that before," said Reuben to himself in indignation, "I'd try to make it come down. I wonder how it is fixed, anyhow?" He leaned forward and studied it, and by the time the lady had gained courage to try again, he had made up his mind that she didn't pinch the spring at the right point, and decided to do it himself, or at least make the attempt. Down came the blind, settling into place with the promptness of one who owned itself mastered.

"Thank you," said the lady, who was young and pretty. "What a thing it is to know how,—isn't it?" and she gave him a handful of peanuts. He felt very nice. It was a pleasant thing to have conquered that blind. He believed he should now know how to raise and lower all car blinds.

A boy in front of him, certainly younger than himself, next attracted our traveler's attention. The boy had his mother with him. That would have been the way you would have put it, had you seen them. You would never have thought of saying that he was with his mother; it was so evident that she was with him! He took such excellent care of her. He watched the sun to keep the blind just right, he fixed up the shawl strap for a pillow to support her head, and put a satchel at her feet. He brought her water in a glass, moving steadily and holding it carefully. When the conductor came through, it was from his, the boy's hat, that the tickets came; and, in short, he was the protector of the lady by his side. Reuben looked on, pleased and observing. When he took his mother out to Monroe to live, he would take just such care of her. By-and-by, finding himself too near the stove, he took a seat with a boy somewhat older than himself, who was in a giggle over something; it was not quite clear what. Two seats in front of them was an old lady, a neat, trim lady, with a frilled-edge white cap, and a black dress and bonnet, looking very much like a neat, good grandmother to some boy or girl. Once there used to be a grandmother in Reuben's home. He remembered her. This woman was in some sort of trouble. Her tired, old face looked red and frightened, and she turned first one pocket inside out and then another; took out the contents of her little black bag one by one, turned them over carefully, shook them and then shook her gray head. Meantime, the boy giggled.

CHAPTER XII.

REUBEN ON THE RAIL.

"Just look at that old woman!" chuckled the boy, nudging Reuben's elbow; "she has been going on that way for the last half hour; she has turned every one of those pockets inside out at least six times. And of all the funny things that she's got in them!—dried leaves, and papers of pins, and a box of pills, and a stick of licorice, and a ball of red yarn, and I don't know what all."

"What is she hunting for," asked Reuben, his tone full of something besides amusement. In his heart he felt very sorry for the troubled old lady.

"Why, that's part of fun; she has lost her ticket. We changed conductors a few stations back, and ever since this new one came on she's had spells of hunting for the ticket. She can't find it high or low; and, between you and me, the conductor has about concluded she is fooling him and never had a ticket."

"Poor thing!" said Reuben. "What will he do about it?"

"Why, he'll put her off; I shouldn't wonder if he did it at the next station; he has got about out of patience with her. It is great fun to see her fumbling there. Wouldn't it be rich to see him put her off?"

"I think it would be horrid!" said Reuben, in indignation. "Aren't there any of the passengers who saw her with a ticket?"

"Oh, you're green; of course she had one; she has been on the cars all day; more than that, I know where it is. There's a little hole right behind her seat,—a sort of crack;

it slipped in there two hours ago; I saw it when it dropped, and I can see the end of it peeping out, when I stoop down; I should think she would get down on the floor and take a look through the cracks; but, she hasn't seemed to think of that at all."

Reuben waited only to flash one indignant glance at the boy from his black eyes, then darted forward, jerking his sleeve away when the other, guessing his object, tried to hold him, and in a moment was by the old lady's side.

"I can find your ticket for you, ma'am," he said; and he dodged under the seat, and pushed his hand up through the hole behind, bringing out with him the ugly pink ticket that had caused the poor old lady such trouble.

"Oh, thank you!" she said, seizing it eagerly. "You are a good boy to your mother, I know. What a word of trouble you have helped me out of. I was more sorry than you can think, to lose the ticket; it wasn't so much the money, though that was enough; but I believe I should have been put off the cars in disgrace; and they would never have let the old lady travel alone again."

"Oh, ho! aren't you a green one?" sneered the boy, when Reuben went back to his seat. "I didn't know that was your granny, or I'd have been more careful of your feelings; I wonder she didn't put her arms around your neck, and kiss you. I say, bubby, are you sure your mother knows you're out?"

"Are you from the poorhouse?" said Reuben, eyeing him gravely.

"From the poorhouse?" repeated the other,—thrown off his guard by the suddenness of the question,—“not much I ain't. What do you mean by that?”

"I heard they took a couple of idiots there last week, and I thought maybe you might be one of them."

This was the beginning of a series of persecutions which Reuben had to endure. The ill-behaved boy by the side of him used his tongue as a weapon, and made all manner of disagreeable speeches, as the train whizzed along. Twice Reuben changed his seat; but the boy immediately followed him, saying he must not think of being separated from the dear little fellow for a moment; he or his granny might come to harm if left to themselves. Beyond the first question, as to whether he was from the poorhouse,—of which, to tell you the truth, he was now a little ashamed,—Reuben took no further notice of his enemy, and tried hard to keep his temper. Presently there came a boy through the car with great yellow oranges, the largest that Reuben had ever seen; and while he was watching, and wondering what Beth would say if she had one of them, and whether he would ever be able to earn money enough to buy her an orange every now and then, a strange thing happened to him. The little old woman in front got out her purse, and bought and paid for two of the nicest oranges in the basket, then trotted over to where Reuben sat, and laid one in his hand.

"I hope it's sweet and juicy, and will keep saying 'Thank you!' for me, all the while you are eating it," she said, heartily, while Reuben stammered his thanks, and blushed, not so much for the orange, as he did for the boy, who broke into a rude laugh, and before the old lady was out of hearing, began,—

"Did its granny give it an orange? Nice boy! should have an orange,—so it should; and it should have a nice bit tied under its chin, so it wouldn't muss its little coiled toatie; yes, so it should," and he seized Reuben's handkerchief, that lay in on the window-seat, and made a bit, and began to tuck it under Reuben's chin. A good deal to his surprise, Reuben sat perfectly still, allowing the tucking to go on without disturbance, only saying, in the most good natured tones, "You're an awkward fellow; I guess you are not much used to doing kindness." Then he began to skillfully peel his orange. He had watched the process too often not to be skilful; but just as he had nicely halved it, his seat-mate gave his elbow a jostle, which almost sent it on the tobacco-stained floor; but for a quick-motivated movement from Reuben, much as a boy would put out his hand to catch a ball, it would have gone.

"Dear me!" said the rude boy, in pretended surprise; "what a narrow escape."

"Very," said Reuben; "it would have been bad for you if it hadn't escaped, as that

is the half I meant for you all the while. Have it?"

"You are a queer chap," said the other, eyeing him closely, and apparently speaking in earnest for the first time. But he took the orange, and sucked it with relish.

"I do say it is a sweet one," he declared; "the old lady knows how to pick them out, Say, honor bright, is she any relation to you?"

"Not that I ever heard of," said Reuben, sucking at his orange, and eyeing the old woman reflectively, wondering who he would have been, and in what way his life would have been different, if she had been a relation of his.

"Where're you going, anyhow?" pursued his new acquaintance. "Is that man over there in the corner, your uncle, or what?"

"What, I guess," said Reuben, laughing. "You seem resolved on giving me some relations."

"Well, I know that old chap; and if I were you I'd be glad he wasn't your uncle nor nothing of that kind."

"Why?"

"O, because, he's a skinflint. I worked for him, once upon a time; stayed three weeks,—the meanest three weeks of my life."

"Perhaps he thinks just so about his life for those three weeks," said Reuben, laughing again, and glancing over to the man whose character was being discussed. He still liked his face, and believed in him, and he had not a very high opinion of the boy who sat beside him.

"Maybe he did!" said the boy, nodding his head with the air of one who could tell a hard story if he chose; "and maybe you don't know anything about it. I live in the same town, and I know all about him; there isn't a boy in town who likes him, —not one."

Reuben instantly made up his mind that he was sorry because the boy lived in the same town where he was going, and resolved not to say a word about his own expectations and plans. Still, it could do no harm to learn what fault all the boys had to find with the man whom he liked so well.

"Why don't they?" he asked.

"Oh, because they don't; he's a mean man to work for; never wants a fellow to have any fun; is always calling out, 'Come, step right; be sharp! don't let the grass grow under your feet; and all such mean things. He docks a fellow's wages if he's five minutes late, and he expects you to work right straight through, from morning till night, without stopping for breath."

"Nor for dinner?" asked Reuben.

"Oh, botheration! you know what I mean. It isn't likely you're so green as all that. Hallo! I declare! I've got home. Where are you going?"

"I'm going here, I suppose," said Reuben, springing to his feet, and seizing Mr. Barrows' satchel before he had time to look for it. Then began one of those crowding, pushing scenes, which every one understands about, who has seen an express train stop at a way station, giving about two minutes for twenty or thirty passengers to get off. Plenty of time, only nobody seems to think so, and they are each determined on being the first one out.

When Mr. Barrows was on the platform, he turned suddenly and said, "I have left my overcoat."

"Hear it, sir," said Reuben, just at his side; and the gentleman who had been talking to Mr. Barrows, said,—

"You have a wide-awake boy there."

"I believe I have," said Mr. Barrows, and he smiled on Reuben.

Among those who were struggling to get out, was the little old lady with her arms full of bundles. Perhaps it was nothing but carelessness that made Reuben's new acquaintance jostle against her, just as she was climbing down the steep steps, sending her bundles lying hither and thither; if it had been an accident, wouldn't you have supposed that he would have picked up the bundles, with a red face, and said, "Excuse me!" instead of which he put his hands in his pockets to keep them from the keen air, and laughed.

Reuben hastily gave the coat and satchel to Mr. Barrows, and stooped down to gather the bundles. Meantime, Mr. Barrows fixed a pair of very keen eyes on the giggling boy. "Andrew," he said, "You have not improved a bit in the last year,—have you?"

"Yes, sir," said the boy promptly; "I'm