

ONLY A PENNY.

"Mamma, I've only a penny,"
I heard a wee girl say;
"And it seems so very little
For me to give away."

"To give away? Where?" said mamma.
"Why, don't you understand?
I want ever so much money
For our new mission band."

"There's a lot of little heathen
In a country far away,
Who don't know hardly anything,—
Not even how to pray."

"As we do here. Their gods, you see,
Are made of stone and wood;
They're taught all kinds of wicked things,
And so they are not good."

"We're going to send them Bibles,
So they'll know the God we do;
And when they know how good he is,
They'll love our Jesus too."

"And then they'll all be happy,"
Said the child in sweet content;
"But it takes a lot of money,
And I have only a cent."

"If it were only a five-cent piece
It would not look so small;
But it seems as if a penny
Were not anything at all."

"My dear," said mamma quietly,
Though a smile o'er her features played,
"You say you have only a penny;
Of what are dollars made?"

"Of cents," said the little maiden.
"Then, darling, don't you see
That, if there were no pennies,
There would no dollars be?"

"Suppose that every little girl
Should say as you have done—
A penny's such a tiny thing
It can't help any one!"

"How many Bibles do you think
That you would send away?
So, don't despise the pennies,
But save them day by day;

"And soon you'll find you have enough
For all you want to do;
For in saving up the pennies
You save the dollars, too."
—*Children's Work for Children.*

THE MAN OF THE HOUSE.

BY PANSY.

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

CHAPTER IX.

ANXIETY.

Mrs. Stone and Beth will always remember that last night of the old year, when they sat up and watched and waited for Reuben and he did not appear. "Mother," had Beth said, something like a dozen times—"Do you think anything can have happened to him?"

"What could happen to him, child?" Mrs. Stone would reply, her voice almost cross. "Reuben knows the way through the city as well as a policeman, and he is a careful boy, and a great many of the policemen know him; so if there had been any kind of an accident we should have heard of it by this time." But she peered out of the window into the darkness, and started at every sound, and grew so pale and so dizzy when once there came a strange step and a knock at her door, that she had to sit down in the nearest chair and send Beth to the door.

It was only a blundering errand boy, who had mistaken his number, and Beth felt as though she would have enjoyed shaking him, to pay him for giving her mothers such a fright.

They set the little table out for three, as usual, and the tea-kettle sang merrily, and Beth prepared to toast the bread for a treat; as a rule, they did not toast the bread because they were so apt to eat a great deal more than they needed, and it took a certain kind of fire that was not economical, but for New Year's Eve Beth resolved to venture. On this night, the coals glowed beautifully, then dimmed, then died out almost entirely, until Beth, discovering, built them

up again with sticks from the morning's stock of kindlings, and cried silently while she wondered what they should do if Reuben were not there to kindle the morning fire; then, indeed, they would be sure that something awful had happened.

"Mother," she said, speaking faintly, "Don't you think you better eat your supper before the tea gets spoiled?"

"Not just yet, child; eat your own supper, if you are hungry."

"Hungry!" Poor Beth swallowed and swallowed, to keep back the tears, and wondered if she would ever be hungry again. By-and-by, as it grew later, the mother took her turn at advice.

"Come, Beth, you may as well eat your bread and milk; Reuben must have had some supper by this time; he has stayed late to help, somewhere, and they have given him his supper."

"I will eat if you will," Beth said, wistfully; her mother looked so pale and heavy-eyed, that she felt able to push back her own anxiety, and try to comfort her.

"I'm not hungry just now," Mrs. Stone said, and she dropped the corner of the curtain that she held up to peer out into the darkness, and went back to her sewing.

After a little, Beth, of her own accord, set away the bread and milk and the little bit of butter, untasted, and came and sat down near her mother; but as her eyes rested on Reuben's slate and arithmetic, her brave little heart misgave her, and she leaned her head on the book, and cried outright.

"I wouldn't be so foolish," said Mrs. Stone reprovingly; "crying won't do any good. Something keeps him, it's likely."

Beth felt sure of that; but the awful question was: What was it? She had her head hidden in her apron, and did not see the tears that her mother brushed away as she spoke.

Meantime, Miss Priscilla Hunter had been bustling about all day, doing no end of work in her new home; by night her sweet-smelling south room was in complete order, and shone like a picture. Much beside work did Miss Priscilla do that day; or at least, much beside arranging her room and tacking down her carpet, that was yet in a line with her regular work; she studied her neighbors. Miss Priscilla was not one who would live for three months next door to a family and not know what their names were, and what they did for a living, and where they went to church, and whether they belonged to her Captain or not. She was always interested in her neighbors.

Beth Stone interested her exceedingly; she had peeps of her a number of times during the short busy day. "That must be Beth," she said to herself, with a sagacious nod of her gray head, as Beth tripped down the stairs, while she stood at the upper landing. "A spry little girl, and as bright as a cricket, I'll venture; ought to be,—to be the sister of such a brother. I wonder how the brave young man is getting on, and whether he sees his way clearer toward supporting his family. He'll support them yet; I'll risk him. He will have to see to it that that little sister wears thicker clothing though, this cold weather,—calico, and rather thin at that; calico is cheap, I know; but it is cold stuff, and always and forever wanting to go into the wash-tub; I like it in summer on that very account; but there's my blue merino tucked away doing good to nobody; it would be just the thing for a New Year's dress for the child; if the 'man of the house' didn't object,—but he would; the child might earn it; I wonder what she can do; several things, I'll venture. I wonder what kind of a mother she has; a good mother, I think; a boy and a girl with such faces are apt to have good mothers; not always, but it is more than likely." So Miss Priscilla talked to herself, and planned, and watched and waited, and by night it really seemed to her that she was pretty well acquainted with the Stones. By dark, she, too, began to be somewhat anxious because the man of the house did not appear.

"I'm sorry he is out so late," she said, stopping frequently to peer out of the window; "I hope it isn't his custom; it won't do for a man with heavy responsibilities like his." As it grew later, her anxiety gave way to positive alarm, mingled with a great pity for the mother and sister across the hall. If he was what she thought him, a trustworthy boy, this must be a new thing, and their anxiety must be great. She listened for sounds from the North room, and at last when she heard an actual outburst

of tears from poor Beth, she seized a cup from her little corner cupboard, and started. It was just as Mrs. Stone was saying reprovingly, "I wouldn't be so foolish," that a tap came at the door. But it was the mother whose face paled suddenly again, and it was Beth who sprang to answer the knock. "It is only your neighbor, Priscilla Hunter," said a cheery voice, whose owner walked in without invitation. "I've come to prove that I am a neighbor, and one of the borrowing kind, too. Could you let me have a little speck of soda? I've a bit of sour milk, and if I hadn't been so foolish as to forget to provide soda, I could have a me griddle cakes for New Year's."

Mrs. Stone arose civilly and took the cup, and got the soda and handed it back to her neighbor, and stood as though she expected her to thank her and go.

"Such was not Miss Priscilla's intention. 'Thank you,' she said heartily, but she set the cup down on the stand and said, 'Why, your room isn't quite so large as mine, is it? That is easier for winter. So you are Beth? I've wanted to see you all day. Reuben took breakfast with me this morning, you know, and he talked a great deal about you; by the way, he is late tonight, isn't he?'"

Whereupon Beth could stand it no longer, but at the mention of the dear name, burst into tears again.

"Elizabeth, I am ashamed of you," said her mother, still reprovingly, but with quivering lip; then she, in few words, explained their nameless terror. "He was never so late before," she said tremulously, "and I don't know what to think."

"I am glad of it, said Miss Priscilla in the cheeriest of tones, helping herself to a chair. "If he were in the habit of being so late, why then, Miss Beth, you might try to some purpose; for it would be pretty certain, some awful habit had got hold of him; but a boy who always comes home early isn't going to stay late without a good reason; he went off this morning as ambitious as the President, to support his family; and I dare say, it being the last day of the year, business has been brisk, and he has found himself, late at night, so far from home that his good common sense has come in and told him to stay all night; for it is piercing cold, and he is a prudent boy as well as a brave one; I kind of think you won't see him till morning."

Beth wiped the tears from her eyes and looked at her mother. A dozen times over had she said to herself, in the last hour, "Oh, what if he shouldn't come all night? What should we do? What should we do? She had not dared to put it into words, for fear it would sound so awful! Yet here it was in plain English, and actually had a comforting sound. Something of the same thought was in the mother's heart.

"I don't know," she said, shaking her head at their visitor; but her voice was somewhat thawed from its civil coldness. "Reuben is a prudent and thoughtful boy for his years; he would think of Beth and me the first thing, and know that we would be frightened about him; and I doubt if he could be persuaded to stay."

"Yes, he could," said Miss Priscilla, still in that positive way which, somehow, on this night, was so comforting. "You see, his very thoughtfulness would help him. Suppose he is four or five miles away at this minute; it is bitter cold, and if he undertook to walk it, he might almost freeze and get himself ready for a fit of sickness; and being a boy of unusual common sense, he knows it; and he would say to himself, 'They'll be a little worried about me of course; but I can make it all right in the morning, and that will be better than walking home late in the cold, and getting sick; mother wouldn't like that.'"

Was Miss Priscilla a prophet? Her voice was so cheery and so decided; it actually comforted the mother to hear such possibilities suggested. "He always thinks of his mother," she said gratefully; and she told herself that if Reuben did come home safely, and nothing dreadful happened, she shouldn't wonder if they really would enjoy their new neighbor.

Miss Hunter seemed bent on making herself agreeable; she chatted on about Reuben, as to what he had said, and how he had helped her in the morning, and the plans they had made about milk, and how careful he had been to say that Beth must only go for it when it was pleasant, and she would like the walk. And so by dint of busy talking she contrived to make the next hour

pass more quickly than the last two had done; but now it was really very late indeed, and the mother could no longer control her strong desire to do something toward finding her boy.

"If I could only go out and look for him," she said in a wistful tone to her new friend. "But where could I go?"

"Sure enough. You see you have no means of knowing which way he went, nor where he is sheltered now; so you would just get your death from cold, and do him no good. I feel it all over me that the boy is safe and comfortable somewhere. Now I'll just tell you the truth; I took a great fancy to that boy of yours this morning, and I've thought about him a good deal all day. He seemed kind of kin to me, somehow; so tonight I found myself watching for him, and when I found he didn't come home, I got that worried about him, that I just got down on my knees and asked the Lord to take him in his care, and see that he got through all right; and he kind of sent me the answer that he would do just that thing. Do you often have such out and out answers to prayer as that?"

"No," said Reuben's mother, positively; "I never have."

As for Beth, she dried her eyes, and held up her head and looked at Miss Hunter in amazement. "How could God have told her that he would take care of Reuben?"

"Well, now I do, real often; and they always come out right, of course; and I never had a clearer answer than I did tonight; so I feel real kind of safe and comfortable about him. You don't know what a relief it is to get right to the Lord with your worries. Oh yes, I hope you do know all about it. But if you haven't tried it tonight, I know it will help you. Now, what I propose is that we three kneel right down now and speak to the Lord about Reuben; it will kind of rest and help us, to hear him say over again that he will attend to it. Here is Beth will be helped by it ever so much; don't you want to try it my dear?"

And Beth, whose knowledge of praying was confined to the few Sundays in which she had been to church and seen the minister close his eyes and fold his hands and talk to God, still, knew enough to be aware that it was a respectable thing to do; in fact, she dimly remembered when her little sister was sick and died years ago, that the minister came two or three times, and always prayed; so, though she did not at all like the idea of praying about Reuben,—because prayer in a house was associated in her mind with awful trouble,—still, she said, "Yes, ma'am," faintly, and without more ado Miss Priscilla slipped on her knees. Mrs. Stone sat bolt upright, but she stopped her needle, and rested her head on her hand; and Beth put her weary little head on the table, and Miss Hunter prayed. It was not like the prayers Beth had heard in the church; she couldn't explain the difference; but she felt it; so much, that once she raised her head softly, and looked around the room; it seemed to her that there must be somebody standing beside Miss Hunter, with whom she was talking. It was a very cheery prayer; it hinted not a word of possible danger to Reuben; it simply asked that he might be taken care of all through the cold night, might sleep safely and sweetly, and get home early in the morning. Then there was a sentence or two of thanksgiving, because she had been heard and answered; and again Beth looked about her and wondered who could have brought an answer.

"Do you know anything about that poor old lady who has the room back of ours?" asked Miss Priscilla, as soon as she arose from her knees. She had concluded that they had talked enough about Reuben. "Her door was ajar as I passed by there this afternoon, and I thought she looked very feeble; who takes care of her?"

Mrs. Stone uttered an exclamation of dismay. "Why, that is old mother Perkins," she said, hastily, "and I declare, I forgot all about her in my anxiety over Reuben; I have not been near her to-night; I always look in on her these cold nights and tuck her up, and see that she is comfortable as I can make her. Nobody takes care of her, ma'am, except us neighbors, the city furnishes her enough to keep her from starving, and she has a son who manages to pay the rent of that room; he comes home once a month to see her; she has been bed-ridden for a week and has needed more care than usual. I ought to go in there this minute." And she hastily rolled up her sewing.