

EDITED

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THE MAN
OF THE HOUSE.

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THE MAN OF THE HOUSE.

BY PANSY.

THEN Reuben walked home with Grace Barrows. She chattered like a magpie, but Reuben was quiet. "What makes you so still?" she asked him at last. Because he had something to think about, he told her.

"What is it? Oh, I know! you are thinking about going home to-morrow, and getting the folks, and coming back, and riding on the cars, and moving every thing. You have a lot of things to think about."

"No," said Reuben, with a grave face. "It would be easy enough to think of all that; but I mustn't do it to-day; you see I promised I'd attend to something else."

"Promised whom? What must you attend to?"

But Reuben did not choose to answer any of these questions; instead, he began to inquire about her class in Sabbath-school; what sort of a teacher they had, what they talked about, and how much she had learned.

"Oh, we didn't talk about any thing much!" said Grace. "Only a little about Peter, and some about Jesus. Miss Pason didn't tell us any thing to remember; at least, I don't remember it, if she did. You had the best teacher in the school, Reuben. Everybody says Miss Parker is the best teacher in our school."

"I believe it," said Reuben sturdily; then he was quiet again. He did not seem to himself to get on with his thinking. How was he ever to do it if this chattering little girl stayed by his side.

When they reached home it was not much better. Mr. Barrows laid aside the newspaper he was reading, and began to talk to Reuben, advising him as to what train to take, and planning for him how soon he could get back.

All the while Reuben sat with a grave, thoughtful face, wondering how he was to keep his promise. He tried to think just what he had promised; to keep as much as possible from thinking about any thing else but the question whether he would belong to Christ or not. "But I don't know how to belong to him," he told himself; and then remembered in the next second that it made no difference; he must decide whether he would belong; after that he could find out how to do it.

"Any thing gone wrong with you?" Mr. Barrows asked at last, with a kind smile, seeing Reuben so quiet.

"No, sir," said Reuben. Then Gracie came to the rescue:

"He has something to think about, papa; something he promised to decide."

"Indeed, what is that?"

"I don't know, papa; it is a secret, I think; but Reuben promised to do it."

"Promised whom?"

"The teacher I had to-day," said Reuben, seeing that Grace was not going to answer for him.

"Yes; and papa, it must be a good promise, for Miss Parker was his teacher."

"I dare say it was," said Mr. Barrows, looking curious. "Do you need any help about it?"

"No," said Reuben slowly, looking very thoughtful; he had nearly said yes; then he remembered that it was something to *decide*. How could anybody help him to decide a question like that? After it was settled, he might need a great deal of help, but not before.

You would be surprised, perhaps, to know how that promise troubled Reuben all the rest of the day; he could not get away from it, and he could not seem to settle the question. He wished for Beth; things always seemed easier and plainer when he talked them over with Beth. But then he remembered that she knew nothing about this matter.

Then he looked over at Gracie; she was a little girl, to be sure, but a very sensible one; he wondered whether she had ever made such a promise as this, and



THEN REUBEN WALKED HOME WITH GRACE BARROWS.

settled the question. She was reading her Sabbath-school book; he didn't like to disturb her.

Presently she looked up and spoke: "I don't believe I like this book; it is for grown-up people."

"How do you know?"

"Why, it is all about folks being Christians; telling them how, and why they ought to be, and all that."

Reuben was astonished; how strange that Gracie's book should be about the very thing of which he had promised to think.

"Does it say there that folks needn't tend to such things until they grow up?"

"Why, no," said Gracie slowly and thoughtfully. "No, it doesn't; it says that little bits of children ought to be Christians; but I don't see how they can."

"Why not?"

"Because they can't be sober all the time, and think about dying and going to heaven."

"Does it say there that when folks are Christians they must be sober all the time, and think about dying and going to heaven?"

"No," said Gracie; and this time she laughed. "But then grown-up folks who are good do, I suppose."

"I don't," said Reuben positively. "I know some good folks who think about their work, and about making nice times for other people, and they look pleasant, and laugh and talk." He thought of Miss Hunter. "What is being a Christian, Gracie?" This, after waiting for her a little, and getting no answer.

"Why, it is being good."

He shook his head. "No, it isn't; it is just loving Christ and trying to mind him."

"Well, don't you have to be good before you can do that?"

"Do you have to be good before you can love your father and mother?"

"Oh, no!" she said, laughing again. "But that is different. Why, Reuben, Christian people are good people."

"Yes, I suppose they grow good; they would have to, of course, if they tried to mind Jesus; but they don't have to be good before they can love him, according to all that I ever heard of."

"No," said Gracie, "of course not; I didn't mean that. People *can't* be good, of course, until they get new hearts; and they won't get them without asking Jesus, and they wouldn't ask him if they didn't love him a little, I suppose."

Reuben turned towards her eagerly; he knew very little indeed about this matter. He was not sure that any thing had been said to him about a new heart; maybe that was something to attend to before he could decide.

"What do you mean by that?" he asked her.

"By what?"

"By getting a new heart."

"Why, I mean just that. Jesus can give folks new hearts, and he does, of course, before they are Christians."

"How can he? Hearts are inside of us. How can God take them out while we are alive and give us new ones?"

"Why, Reuben Stone! don't you know what I mean? Of course our hearts are not taken out of us! But Jesus puts new thoughts in them; makes them over in some way, so we can like to do things that before we didn't like to. I don't know how he does it, but I know that is what a new heart means, and you've got to have one before you can be a Christian."

"And you get it for the asking?"

"Yes," said Gracie confidentially—she had been well taught—"you get it for the asking; and then you are a great deal happier than you ever were before; and you like to pray, and read the Bible, and go to church, and all that; and you aren't afraid to die."

"Have you got one?"

"Why, no!" and this time she blushed a little as well as laughed. "What a queer boy you are! I told you I thought it was for grown-up folks. How can little girls think about such things?"

"But little girls might have to die. The other day when Samson was running away with you, he was going straight toward the lake, and it wasn't frozen over then, and he might have tumbled you in and drowned you."

"Don't," said Gracie. "It makes me shiver all over;" and she hid her face in her hands.

Pretty soon she ran away to her mother and told her that Reuben Stone was the queerest boy to talk she had ever heard of in her life.

Then Reuben, left alone, went on with his thinking. Grace had certainly given him several reasons why he ought to decide this question. He thought she was a queer little girl to know so many reasons why it would be nice to be a Christian, and knew just how to become one, and yet would rather wait until she was grown up.

"I don't believe I would," he said to himself. "I'd like to begin now. It's hard work, I suppose. All new things are hard to do, and some old ones; but it would be nice to feel that you wasn't afraid of any thing. Then there's lots of places where a fellow needs help; and he helped me once. I know a few things. I know I'll have to read the Bible; I don't like that very well, but I should if Gracie knows what she is talking about, and I got that new heart."

Before him on the table lay a little bit of a blue-covered book, not more than two inches wide, and hardly three inches long. Reuben stretched out his hand to it, then drew it back. Hadn't he promised to think of nothing but this question all this day? Still, it might be something that would help him. He would just glance at it. *Heavenly Manna* was the name of it. Reuben didn't know the meaning of "manna," but the word "heavenly" seemed to fit the subject, so he looked inside, and found it to be a little book of prayers and promises, dated to suit the days of the year. Of course the most natural thing in the world was for him to turn to the date of the day, and look at the verses. He could hardly believe his eyes. How very strange! These were the verses:

"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."

"A new heart will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you."

"There's the prayer, and there's the answer," said Reuben thoughtfully. "The thing is now for me to do it."

But for some reason that he did not himself understand, he did not do it. He knew something about Satan, but he did not, after all, know what an enemy he was, nor how frightened he was about this afternoon's work; nor how anxious he was to keep the boy from deciding this important question once for all. If he could only get him to thinking of something else! Reuben wondered a good many times in the course of that day, what could be the matter with his mind. It was so determined to think of every thing but the question. He came back to it again and again, because his promise called him; but it did not hold him steadily to the work. And so it happened that when the day was gone, and Reuben was ready to lie down in his bed, he said to himself with a sigh:

"Well, I've done my best, anyhow. I never knew it was so awful hard to keep thinking of the same thing. Nothing has come of it, either. I don't decide. Why don't I? It's queer, now, but I can't tell why I don't. Gracie made me think she was a goosie for not deciding. I suppose I'm a goosie. I wonder what mother thinks! She must have had this question to decide ever so long ago. Maybe she is at it yet."

A feeling came over the boy that he wouldn't like to be so long settling the matter as his mother had been,

supposing she was still thinking about it. Then why didn't he kneel down then and there and ask Jesus Christ to take him? He didn't know what kept him from that, but Satan knew very well, and laughed in triumph when the boy went to sleep without praying at all.

In the middle of the night Reuben opened his eyes, looked about him in the darkness, and wondered what noise that was that he heard. He raised himself on one elbow and listened. There were certainly people talking. It couldn't be that the family were just getting still for the night, for Reuben knew by the darkness that the moon was gone, and he knew it did not set until after eleven o'clock. It must be about midnight. But the talking was growing more distinct:

"Where can that confounded key be, anyhow?"

"He always hangs it by the sink. I've seen him do it fifty times when I've been here with milk."

"Well, he didn't do it the fifty-first time, anyhow, for it ain't here. I've felt all around."

"You better not talk so loud. First you know somebody will hear us."

"Somebody can't. That's Rupert's room over the kitchen, and I told you before we started that he was five miles away, out in the country. Shut that door! I'm going to risk a match."

All this Reuben heard as plainly as though he was in the kitchen. It took him much less time to hear it than it has taken me to tell it, and all the time he was thinking fast.

This was the way it looked to him: Somebody was in the kitchen hunting for the key to the barn. They either meant to steal Samson altogether, or run away with him for a stolen ride that night. Another thing he knew, that he was the last one who had the barn key, and he hung it across the room from the sink, over behind the closet door. He had come to the sink to hang it up, and Hannah had said: "You can't get here now; put the key on the hook behind the door; Rupert does sometimes."

How did those fellows get into the kitchen? The door was open, for he had heard the order to shut it. He knew something about that, too. He could see himself sitting by the kitchen window, and Hannah asking him if he wasn't going to bed to-night, and saying she was going to lock up now. Then he had said with a sudden start:

"O, Hannah, the kitchen key is up-stairs in my room! You gave it to me this morning, you know, to unlock the wash-room door, and I carried it up there. I'll run and get it."

And Hannah had answered:

"No, you needn't. I'll slip the bolt. It's better than the key, anyhow."

But she must have forgotten to slip the bolt.

Now, how did he come to be in the room over the kitchen, hearing all this? Why, Mrs. Barrows had said just before he went up to bed:

"It's bitterly cold to-night. Reuben, I think I will send you to Rupert's room to sleep. That little north room where I put you is pretty cold, and it is nice and warm in the kitchen chamber. Rupert won't be back until to-morrow night."

So Reuben, though he had said that he did not mind the cold, and the little north room was splendid, went off well pleased to the hired man's comfortable quarters, and rejoiced that Rupert had been given a holiday, and gone into the country to see his mother.

That was the way he came to be last at the barn, and to know about the key.

Don't you know how fast people can think? All this flashed through Reuben's mind with the speed of lightning. And he took time to think how strange it was that all these little things that seemed to have nothing to

do with it all, should have happened, one after another, so that he knew the whole story. More than that, he knew what he meant to try to do. To go down the front stairs and knock at Mr. Barrows' door, and carry on a conversation with him, would be very likely to warn the thieves, if they were thieves, and they acted like it. Then they would slip away with whatever they



"YOU BETTER NOT TALK SO LOUD."

chose to carry, and no one would be the wiser. The family might think he dreamed out the whole story. And perhaps the thieves would come the next night and carry out their plans. He would do no such thing as that.

He slipped out of bed and pushed up his little window. Below him was the roof of the outer kitchen, or shed; easy enough for a sure-footed boy like Reuben to let himself down to that, and swing off to the coal-box below, and from there to the ground. What then? Why, then he had the kitchen key in his hand, and the visitors had shut the door. What was to hinder him from slipping around and making them prisoners, by turning the key in the lock? The windows he knew were secured by strong shutters, the fastenings of which had a trick of not opening save for those who knew how to touch just the right spring. Gracie had amused herself for fifteen minutes on Saturday, by watching him try to find the secret of that spring. Reuben thought of that as another little thing that had been planned to fit this night's work. He was out of the window like a cat, not even waiting for clothes; waiting only to get the key from the little table where he had brought it and laid it when he went to the north room for his jacket. Why he brought the key back with him he did not know. He was down now on the frozen ground. It was bitterly cold, and his little shirt was none of the warmest. He wished he had wrapped himself in a quilt, but that would have hindered his quick, light steps, perhaps. His bare feet made no sound on the snow, and in a minute more he stood before the kitchen door, key in hand.

Could he find the key-hole? Would the key slip in easily without noise? What if the fellows inside should hear him, and should rush to the door and open it, and seize him, and choke him, before he could cry out?

WALKING WITHOUT LEGS.

TELL us a story, uncle John," said the children, as they all gathered around him. And he began: "Well, I once heard of a man who had no arms. And on the other side of the road lived a man who had no legs. And they were farmers. And it was spring-time, when the seed must be sown. And there was no one to sow it for them. But the seed must be sown before they could have a harvest. But a man must have legs and arms to sow with. Yet these men—one without legs and the other without arms—*did* sow their grain. Guess how they did it! Can you tell, Jamie?"

"They got somebody to help them."

"No, no, my boy! There wasn't anybody about there to help them. Their neighbors were all hard at work sowing their own seed, or they were gone a-fishing, or to the circus, or wouldn't help them, or something was to pay. They did it themselves. But how? Can you guess, Jessie?"

"I dess they waited till their neighbors tum home with their fess; and after supper it was done."

"How do you think they did it, Lulu?"

"I dunno," said Miss Lulu; "but gran'ma knows every thing. I'll jest run an' ask her."

But while she was gone to ask gran'ma, up spoke master Carroll, who had been listening carefully and twisting his fat face into many funny shapes, thinking how a man without legs could walk through his fields, and how another with no arms could scatter wheat and oat-seed about the land.

"I know! I know! shall I tell? Oh! wasn't that funny? ha, ha, ha!" And the little fellow whirled about upon his heel like a top, laughing enough for all the company together.

By that time Lulu got back with a beaming face. She had the secret, and looked very wise, and almost despised the others because they didn't know as much as she.

"Carroll has guessed it!" was shouted, as she came nearer. "Carroll knows it."

"No he doesn't, either," said Miss Lulu. "He couldn't, so. I don't believe it. Carroll can't tell; there! there! there!"

"I do know; I do!" shouted Carroll again. "One got on the other's shoulder; ha, ha, ha!"

"He couldn't," answered up the vexed Lulu. "He couldn't; he hadn't legs. He couldn't climb without legs; there! there! there!"

"He could! he could! One stooped down, and the other jest sot on his shoulder; and then the one that had the legs, he did all the walking, and the one that had arms, he did all the sowing. Wasn't that spl-e-e-endid?" And Carroll laughed till his little sides shook as though they would come off.

But Lulu refused to join in the laugh. So gathering up her playthings, she started off, saying: "I don't care; somebody told Carroll; and if they didn't, he should 'ave let me tell how they did it." And she disappeared up-stairs.

But they went on talking about those two funny men that had "neither legs nor arms," and yet walked and sowed.

Then said uncle John: "Who can get a lesson from this funny story?"

"I can," said Carroll; "it is to —"

"Stop, stop!" shouted Jamie; "give me a chance first. You, master Carroll, mustn't be guessing all the good things first. I know one of the lessons from this story as well as you, master Carroll."

"Tell it, then, if you're so smart," said a voice down from the stairway. "You down there, you think you

know about every thing. Guess I know one of the lessons that you don't any of you know; there!"

"Tell it then, tell it!" was the merry answer from below.

"Guess I ain't going to tell all I know, 'less I want to," was Lulu's ill-natured answer.

"Well, Jamie, what were you going to say," inquired uncle John.

"Why," answered Jamie, swelling with his knowledge, "when you have something that must be done, and you can't git any fellow to help you 'cause they've all gone a-fishing, or to the circus, or won't, you must jest do it yourself the best way you can." And Jamie walked backward and forward, and thought himself quite a philosopher.

And they all said: "Good! good! good for Jamie."

"And what lesson do you see in this story, Jessie?" was asked.

"Mustn't wait till after supper to sow onions," put in the eager Jessie.

And it wasn't so bad a lesson, especially if supper is late.

And now Carroll spoke:

"Help one another."

"Jest es zif that's the lesson," came down from the staircase again. "I know something better than that, if I wanted to tell it; but I don't tell all I know." And the stair door opened a little way further, and two pouty eyes could be seen through the crack.

"Isn't Carroll spl-e-e-endid to guess so good every time?" said the others.

And uncle John said "Yes. Help one another, that's it. Some people haven't any eyes—"

"And I can lend them mine," put in Carroll.

"And some are old and feeble, and it tires them to walk about—"

"I can run down cellar for my poor tired mamma," spoke up Jamie, quickly. "And hunt for my shoes and stockin's, and my cap and my 'rithmetic and slate and pencil, and not bother her to do it."

"And some old people can't see to thread their needle," uncle John continued.

"Guess I always threaded gran'ma's fore ever this story was told," came through the crack of the stair door. And then the crack got a little wider.

"And some people get very cross, and it is so hard for them to get over it; but I guess they would get over it if some that have legs would run and help them."

And uncle John looked right at Carroll; but the dear boy knew in a moment what was meant, and with three bounds he was at the stair door, and seizing little Miss Lulu by the hand he came hippy-ti-hopping back with her and saying: "You must come now and help us guess the rest."

"And there was once a dear man, and He came down to this world, and He went all about blessing people and doing them good and teaching them how to be good and happy. But some very wicked people were mad at Him. And they took Him and fastened Him to a tree with nails through His hands and through His feet. And He died, and He was buried. But God raised Him from the grave, and He went to Heaven. And now He wants all the boys and girls to go about doing good, just as He did. Uncle John's voice was very tender as he said this.

"He may have my feet," said Carroll, "I want to serve Him."

"And mine," Jamie said.

"Mine too," spoke up Jessie.

"I wonder if He could use mine?" said the sorrowful Lulu. And she ran away and asked grandma all about it.

Lulu is a different girl now. She walks many miles every week for that Man who is Jesus.