

SUSIE REDMAYNE:

OR,
A Story of the Seamy Side of Child-life.

BY
CHRISTABEL.

CHAPTER VI.

THE DAWN OF BETTER DAYS.

RICHARD REDMAYNE looked very much out of place as he stood beside Susie's bed. Being very much in awe of the doctor and the ladies, he had tried to improve his appearance. But his best clothes had been pawned long ago, and were passed redemption.

His soiled and ragged coat was a painful contrast to Susie's delicate surroundings.

He would fain have rushed from the spot, he was so ashamed of himself; but still he stood spell-bound by the earnest little face that lay before him, and the still more earnest words that fell from the small, parched lips.

"Oh, father, Ralph can't help it when he doesn't earn more money; when I grow up I mean to earn some too; and I'm going to wash and darn your things and Ralph's; but you won't beat us then, and you wouldn't beat us now if you didn't drink that stuff out of bottles.

"Oh don't drink any more of it! Ralph tells me when we are quite alone that we should be so happy if you didn't take it.

"Oh, do break the bottle! Ralph will get us nice breakfasts then. And when you don't take his money he's going to buy me a dress and take me to Sunday-school. Oh do take me to-day; I want to hear them sing the hymns that Ralph used to learn."

Her tone was bitterly sad. She was a child of misery. Her voice had never had the musical ring of a happy child. Yet it was full of plaintive sweetness.

So she went on appealing to this misguided man. Those who stood near looked upon him as a hard-hearted wretch, whom it would be almost useless trying to soften.

Not one person there knew what was passing in the man's mind, nor dreamt of the mental torture he had been enduring for days past. To them he was simply a confirmed drunkard and a cruel father, a sort of lost piece of humanity. Could they but have discerned his inward sensitiveness, remorse, his vague yet strong desire for better things, they would have been overjoyed.

While Miss Roland and Miss Frere were watching Redmayne, trying to read the expression of his face, wondering within themselves if the child's words touched him, he was making the bravest efforts to seem impassive, and to behave as he imagined he would be expected to behave in a house like Miss Roland's.

While Miss Roland was thinking prayerfully whether it would be worth while to attempt doing anything toward this man's reformation, God himself was taking it in hand and working wonders that would one day seem like miracles, even to the man himself.

When he left the room, Miss Roland went out to the landing with him.

"Does it not grieve you to see your poor little girl in such a state as this?" Miss Roland asked.

"Grieve me!" the man said. "I'd give my life to save hers."

The words and the tone were like sudden insight to the little elderly lady, who thought she knew so very much of the world, and yet met with a fresh surprise daily.

"But you cannot have cared much for your children?" she said.

The man paused as if bewildered by the inward survey of himself.

"I cared more than I knew," he said presently; "and it stunned me and left me wretched when I knew I had drove 'em away. I'll be wretcheder still, I'm thinking, when little Susie goes to where her mother is."

Richard Redmayne went away feeling very hopeless, but he left hope behind him. Miss Roland's thoughts of him were by no means so hard or so desponding as they had been. It was a deep joy to her to think that she might in some humble way help in raising this fallen man.

When Redmayne entered his own dwelling that night he was in a very unenviable state of mind. He sincerely wished to give up strong drink, which had been the curse of his life; but his love for it and its power over him was as strong as ever.

He was torn by the desire to be a better man and by the cravings of a habit long indulged in, which he felt unable to conquer.

Again Richard Redmayne was summoned to Susie's bedside. It was not expected she had many hours to live. But the little thing was quite content to die. It is seldom that the young cling to life as the old do. Besides, what had life held that was dear to Susie?—only Ralph.

No tender feminine hand had smoothed the little difficulties of childhood for Susie. The group around Susie's bed was very sad and tearful. It seemed as if the child that had been so friendless during her short life was not to be laid in her grave unwept.

Slowly the little life appeared to be ebbing away. Once she looked up inquiringly and said:

"Will it be long before I see the angels; and will they take me to Jesus?"

But not yet was the crown ready for the child-martyr. The little feet had yet to grow and tread this probationary life through many sorrows interspersed by much happiness.

Just as she was expected to breathe her last she quietly fell asleep.

Richard Redmayne had stood by the bedside in silence, save for an occasional yes or no in answer to a question.

The man's sorrow was as intense as it could be, and he prayed himself that it might be as the purifying fire from off the altar, wherewith the seraphim, touching the lips of Isaiah, purged him from his sin.

When he understood that danger was over for the present, his gratitude was as silent as his sorrow had been.

He made no new resolutions as he stood there. It did not seem to him necessary to make any. He felt that the impossibility would be to go back to the old life that he had lived before.

He shrank from the thought of the man shrinks from the thought of the death that he has just escaped.

He seemed to himself to be standing on a rock between two seas. A dark, stormy sea that he had passed, and a sea in the future before him that might yet be what he chose to make it.

Miss Frere was perceptive and sympathizing. She seemed to understand without words how the man had sinned, and how intensely capable he was of sorrow for his sin. She was not one to break a bruised reed; but rather to help the bruised reed to stand up straight again, and to bear its own burden with bravery.

"Come with me," she said to him, taking him aside into a little homely room, known as Miss Frere's study.

"You have lost your regular work?" asked Miss Frere.

"Yes, ma'am, I lost that long ago, and no wonder. For two years passed I've never had nothing but a bit of work just when they were pushed."

"Who do you mean by they?"

"I was meaning my masters, Axby and Hunter, the coach-builders."

"You'll have seen a good deal of Mr. Axby, I suppose?" said Miss Frere.

"Yes, I used to see him every day; he were a good master, and he knew I were a good hand, but he couldn't put up with me no longer."

"Do you think he would take you back again?"

"I have no heart to hope that he would."

"Should you mind my asking him?"

"Mind!" ejaculated the man; "I'd be more grateful to you than ever I were to anybody in my life before."

"Well, then, listen to me. If you will sign the temperance pledge to-night and determine honestly to keep it, I'll go and see Mr. Axby to-morrow."

Richard Redmayne did not hesitate; he no longer than was right and good for him to do.

Miss Frere had no wish that he should act rashly. She saw with satisfaction that his cheek was paler, his lips quivering, and the hand that held the pen tremulous with emotion. As he laid the pen down, with emotion. As he laid the pen down, with emotion. As he laid the pen down, with emotion.

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CHAPTER VII.

MISS FRERE'S SUCCESS.

THE weeks passed on very pleasantly, in the luxurious suburban home, during Susie's convalescence.

While she was an invalid Miss Frere had talked to her so much of the love of Jesus and of heaven, that the child had almost longed to go.

But now that she had gained her strength, her new home was so pleasant, that to her small imagination she could not think that heaven would have been happier.

The little wistful blue eyes looked out from the bay-window upon a placid and peaceful scene. Undulating fields, dotted here and there with tall trees and stately villas, stretched away to the borders of a wide moor.

Within, a bright fire was burning; in one corner stood the piano that Miss Frere had used when she was a child; in another was a work-table inlaid with ivory; and all about the room there was an agreeable confusion of books, music, sketches, finished drawings, and beautiful half-finished work.

Susie was sitting by the fire, thinking herself a big girl, because she was learning to sew.

How many little cold and shoeless feet would have been glad to rest upon that warm, soft hearth-rug, besides Susie's!

It was as natural to Miss Frere to impart knowledge as it was to acquire it. She was always teaching, though she was not aware of it. Her love for intellectual things was too passionate and real to allow of any mixture of pride or pedantry.

She carried about her a halo of refinement and knowledge, and anyone who came into her presence could be raised to a higher intellectual level if they chose.

Little Susie was an apt pupil. Her tiny fingers could already play the "Spanish Chant." She could recite poetry, and she was trying very earnestly to write her own name.

For many years after Miss Frere carefully superintended Susie's education.

Not long after this, Miss Frere sent for Redmayne and told him of the conditions upon which he was to be again employed.

"I have, of course, told Mr. Axby that you have signed the temperance pledge," said Miss Frere, "and he rejoiced when he heard it. Upon your keeping that pledge everything depends. Not only Mr. Axby's favour and good-will, and not only your own health and prosperity, but upon this same thing hangs the well-being of your two little ones."

"You have it now in your own power to make or to mar their future lives to an extent you little dream of. You can take them back to such a home as the home you made for them before, and you can make them acquainted with every kind of suffering."

"On the other hand, humanly speaking, it is in your power to make their home the reverse of what it was."

"You can keep them entirely from want. You can give them such training, such education, as will enable them to make their existence a noble and elevated thing."

"You know that you cannot do this in your own strength; if you try to walk alone you will fall. Help is always ready. If you seek it you will find it."

"Yes, ma'am, but seeking isn't easy."

"Easy, no!" said Miss Frere; "no noble thing was ever easy!"

Imagine the passing of six long years—six long years of human life,—each one chequered with light and shade, each one dimmed with sorrow of one kind or another, each one a battle, each one a strife, and perhaps each one holding more or less of victory.

We must go back a little, and the most important thing we have to record is the fact that Richard Redmayne never broke his pledge, although he was often strongly tempted to do so.

But all this was in the past of Richard Redmayne's life.

It is of the present we would write now; the present of a man and his children who have fought their way gradually from the depths of sin and misery to a bright, peaceful, hopeful standing-ground, from whence they can look backward over the past with calm thankfulness, and forward

over the future with perfect humble trust and faith in God.

Let us take an autumn walk, and turn our steps southwest of the populous town of Yarnborough.

This place, Princethorpe by name, is a populous place. There are small red villas dotted about it, inclosed among young trees and breathing an air of new prosperity.

One of these, standing a little further back from the road than the others, is a home with which this story has to do.

This September evening is very fine. Princethorpe is still and quiet, so still that you can hear the ringing of the blacksmith's anvil, which is nearly half a mile off.

Suddenly our attention is caught by the unusual beauty of one of the villa gardens. We perceive at once that the flowers are not grown for display.

Everywhere there is a splendid glow of colour, everywhere there is grace and beauty and unusual taste.

Turning a corner in the garden path, quite suddenly we come upon a green arbour covered with the trailing hop, and the same shining tufts of clematis that covered the arches in the garden path. To our surprise we find that the arbour is not empty. There are seats and a table, and near the table sit two youthful figures, both of whom we have seen before. One is a maiden of eighteen summers, blue-eyed, golden-haired, and with a look of sweet subdued beauty on her face, that tells of remembered sorrow as well as of present happiness and peace. The tall slight young man who is by her side is evidently her brother; he has darker hair, and eyes of a different blue, but the features and expression are decidedly similar.

We recognize him as Ralph Redmayne, and the girl as Susie; the children of Mr. Richard Redmayne, superintendent at Axby's carriage works; once the ruined man who lived in Piper's Court, now the prosperous man who has built himself a villa at Princethorpe.

Let us listen a moment to what his children are saying:

"Father says you promise to be a better man of business than ever he has been, Ralph."

"Ah! it's like dear old father to say that. I do help him all I can. But I think he wouldn't like to give up altogether yet."

"No, I'm sure he wouldn't," Susie said. "Don't let us speak of any change. We are so happy. No change could make us happier."

Ralph mused a moment. "No, perhaps not," he said; "but I fancy, Susie, that if we hadn't known so well what sorrow meant we shouldn't know so well what happiness means now."

"I think that too, Ralph," said Susie. "There is never a day that I do not remember the old life and the old misery; never a day that I do not pray that God would continue to bless us. I never feel that anything is ours. It seems to me as if God lent things to us day by day. And I always ask him that I may use the commonest things reverently, knowing that they are his."

Ralph paused for a moment then he said, "Perhaps I don't think so much of these things as you do, Susie. I haven't the same time to think. But I do often feel that we ought to be the thankfullest people in God's wide world!"

THE END.

A GOOD DOG.

"HELP," the railway dog of England, has just died at Newhaven. For thirty-five years he was guard of the tidal train from London to Newhaven, and acted as collector for money in aid of the Orphan Fund of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants.

His mission was made known by a silver collar, to which was appended a silver medal, having on it the inscription: "I am 'Help,' the railway dog of England, and travelling agent for the orphans of railway men who are killed on duty. My office is at 55 Colbrook Row, London, where subscriptions will be thankfully received and duly acknowledged." Altogether, he was instrumental in obtaining upwards of £1,000 for the orphan fund.