

The youngest son fell to the bottom of the river's bed; luckily it was nearly dry, but his bones were almost broken, and the bank was so steep that he could find no way to get out. Then the old fox came once more, and scolded him for not following his advice, otherwise no evil would have befallen him. "Yes," said he, "I cannot leave you here, so lay hold of my tail and hold fast." Then he pulled him out of the river and said to him as he got upon the bank, "Your brothers have set watch to kill you if they find you in the kingdom." So he dressed himself as a poor man, and came secretly to the king's court, and was scarcely within doors when the horse began to eat, and the bird to sing, and the princess left off weeping. Then he went to the king and told him all his brothers' roguery, and they were seized and punished, and he had the princess given to him again; and after the king's death he was heir to his kingdom.

A long while after he went to walk one day in the wood, and the old fox met him and besought him with tears in his eyes to kill him and cut off his head and feet. And at last he did so, and in a moment the fox was changed into a man, and turned out to be a brother of the princess who had been lost a great many years.

SUSIE REDMAYNE, OR THE BITTER CRY.

(By Christabel)

Yet over their short-lived happiness there hung a cloud. They could not shape their fears into words. But a vague, undefined dread of what might happen haunted them; a consciousness that Bessie Brown would leave them, and with her would go all hope, and comfort, and happiness.

Bessie Brown was a great power in Piper's Court. She had known better days. Most of the women there knew that in comparison with themselves, she was a lady. They said it was because she had lived among fine people. But the greatest difference was that she was a true Christian. A Christian woman cannot be coarse or vulgar. Some laughed at her, and many were spiteful to her in small ways. Still she kept on her way calm and peaceful, and kept her light burning, although she dwelt in a dark place.

When Bessie had done what she could for the little Redmaynes she went back to her room, which looked cozy and cheerful in contrast with the desolate one she had left. She half wished she had taken the children with her, but then there was the father to be considered.

Ralph and Susie were weary and sleepy, and fain to creep to their comfortable beds. But still they sat and waited, half hoping and half fearing their father would come.

"Is that father? Shall I hide in bed?" said Susie, as she laid her trembling hand on her brother's arm.

"Yes, father's coming," said Ralph, as the sound of uncertain footsteps came nearer; "but never mind, perhaps he won't be cross."

CHAPTER II.—THE WAY OF LIFE IN PIPER'S COURT.

The door was pushed open and Richard Redmayne walked or rather tottered into his desolate home.

He had been a man of fine presence and great respectability, but he had fallen through strong drink.

There was still an indescribable air of refinement about him, though his coat hung in tatters and his face was red and bloated. An ordinary acquaintance, who had known him when his wife was living, would hardly have recognized the wreck that he now was.

In the early part of his married life he was a prosperous coach-painter, and showed signs of artistic talent. He was then a happy and hopeful man.

But things had gone hardly with him, he had lost his wife, to whom he was fondly attached, and he had lost part of his trade without much fault of his own.

It seemed an easy way to purchase forgetfulness by taking spirits. At first a friend, seeing him low-spirited, had prevailed upon him to take just a little to do him good.

A false friend, and a false step leading to an unknown abyss!

The transition from a lonely house with a grumbling housekeeper and a fretting, delicate baby, to a gin-palace appeared too pleasant to be resisted, and he fell on an easy prey to the arch-fiend of strong drink.

"Here, Ralph, what hast thou earned to-day?" said Redmayne as he stumbled into a chair.

"Nothing, father; I couldn't get anything to do."

Ralph awaited what might follow with the calm courage that a good conscience gives.

A heavy blow, then a crash followed. And the little table with the few things which Susie had carefully placed in readiness, should her father require them for his supper, were strewn in fragments around the wretched room.

Susie crept in silence to bed and pressed the coverlet into her mouth to prevent her sobs being audible to her father.

Ralph stood still. He was too miserable to care what happened to himself. Only for Susie's sake he hoped his father would not strike him.

"Here, lazy young 'un, go quick and bring some rum," and Richard Redmayne held out a shilling, which the boy promptly took, and hastily snatching a jug ran off to execute his errand.

Fearing he would be too late he made all possible haste. He was an obedient boy, and in his anxiety to satisfy his father he forgot that the slush from the streets oozed in and out at every step from his worn out boots.

Ralph's anxiety was useless. The gin-palaces had closed, and he had to return with his shilling and his empty jug.

That precious shilling was just now a burden to him, although it would procure them all a breakfast which they greatly needed.

Ralph said to himself many times over as he slowly retraced his steps, "I would rather go anywhere than home, and I would run away, but I can't take the shilling. I won't be dishonest. Besides, father and Susie need it. They have nothing for breakfast. Then there is the jug; if I threw it away it would be mean. And there is Susie, who is far more to me than these things. Oh, Susie! I never will be a coward and leave you alone with father. Perhaps mother will know, and she wouldn't be pleased if I left you."

He looked up to the skies, and through the murky atmosphere he could see shining dimly a few far-off stars.

He fancied his mother might be looking down upon him as the stars appeared to do, and he said passionately, "Oh, mother, I will go home to-night because of Susie, and the shilling, and the broken jug."

There was One above who knew that he went home for conscience sake, and the blessing of a mind at peace with itself was given to him.

Very quietly Ralph opened the door. He hardly knew what he dreaded, but if a lion had been there he could scarcely have feared it more. A prescient haunt had told him that he was treading on a crisis. Quietly too he crossed the floor and laid the shilling on the mantel shelf.

A piece of tallow candle was burning in the socket of a shaly tin candlestick; its flickering light was enough to show to Ralph that the heavy sleep of a drunkard had laid its merciful hold upon his father, and that not yet had the dreaded crisis come.

Richard Redmayne had never struck his helpless children quite unprovoked. To this depth of brutality he had not yet descended. But not the less certainly did Ralph know that day by day he came nearer to it. To a sensitive and imaginative child, who is yet brave and true, the shadow of a coming sorrow is a greater torment than the trial itself.

The flickering candle died out, and Ralph groped his way to Susie's bed that he might kneel there and say the prayers his mother had taught him. It seemed a more holy and sacred place, and a more fitting place for prayer, beside the innocent child than near the degraded father.

Then the invisible hand of sleep wrapped him up, and mercifully, for a few hours, shut out from all eyes the horrors of a drunkard's home!

The morning dawned chill and cheerless in Piper's Court; and much misery and poverty were awakened from unrefreshing slumbers.

There were cracked windows and rickety doors that let in not only the keen wind but also the snow it carried along with it. And what was worse it blew its icy breath over scant breakfast tables, and penetrated thin garments that were only fit for mild weather.

Ralph was the first to awake in the cold rooms which the Redmaynes called home.

He was quickly on the alert to make the best of things; and he could manage household matters more economically than many housekeepers, for necessity had sharpened his wits.

The sight of the shilling was a real joy to him now.

The small shops in the narrow street adjoining Piper's Court were very accommodating.

If you only had a penny, you could have a pennyworth of tea.

Ralph calculated over and over again how to get the best breakfast out of the shilling, for it was an important matter to be intrusted with a coin of such value.

When Redmayne roused himself from the heavy torpor of his sleep he was very thankful to see a breakfast on the table that would ease a little the burning thirst which he was suffering.

He knew that he already felt like an aged man, although he was not forty; and he knew also that through the love of strong drink he was fast approaching either a drunkard's or a suicide's grave.

"Ralph, thou'lt be a better man than I have been," and a slight accent of hope pervaded the bitter tone in which he spoke.

Now when alcohol had no power over him he hated himself, and he was glad that it was not in his power to quite ruin the future promise of his boy; for he saw that he inherited his mother's firmness and stability of character, along with his own good temper.

"Father, why can't you be as you were when mother was living?" but the tone had in it no shade of hope.

Ralph had known too much of the bitterness of hoping only to be disappointed, to care ever to hope again.

"Ah!" said Redmayne, as if he were pitying himself, "if thy mother had lived we might have had a happy and comfortable home."

"When I'm a big boy," said Ralph, cheerfully, and his eyes were lit up with brightness, for it so easy for youth to weave fairy like visions, "I mean to join a Band of Hope, and I shall earn lots of money, and Susie shall be a lady. Won't that be grand?"

A sweet little silvery laugh was the answer from the straw bed and ragged coverlet, and Susie opened her eyes wide when she saw that there really was bread and butter and hot coffee for breakfast.

Children are acute observers, and although Susie was generally afraid of her father she knew that she could trust him in his present mood.

She climbed upon his knee, and stroked his whiskers, and put her arms round his neck as if he had been the best of fathers to her.

So readily does childhood accept the stray sunbeams that cross its path. Her father returned her caresses, and enjoyed her love, and wished as sincerely as herself that things could be always like that.

Yet at that very moment, in the midst of his remorse and shame, and the love that still remained for his children, the craving for strong drink held him so powerfully in its iron grip, that he could have sold himself into slavery that he might gratify the desire a little longer.

So full of contradictions is the character of a good-natured drunkard.

When the humble meal was finished Ralph returned thanks reverently, and quickly got himself ready to go out to seek some work.

In the meantime Richard Redmayne slunk away, saying that it was time he was at work.

Then Ralph went to Susie and kissed her and tried to comfort her.

He was deeply grieved that he was obliged to leave her alone. No mother could have been more tender.

"Now, Susie, be a little woman," said Ralph, "and I won't stay a minute longer than I can help. Just think that you are the mistress and I'm the master. I go out to earn the money, and you keep things tidy, and have the kettle boiling for me when I come in. I feel as though I should get lots of things to do to-day, and we'll have such a jolly little dinner to ourselves; for likely enough father will not come near us any more till bedtime."

Ralph thought he would try the station to-day; and just as he ran up out of breath an old gentleman emerged from the crowded doorway, carrying in his hand a small portmanteau.

"Please, sir, can I carry it for you?" and

the tones of the boy were so eager that the gentleman couldn't help looking at him. He preferred carrying his own bag, but he had a kind heart and he couldn't disappoint the boy.

On arriving at the door of his home the old gentleman, being a little curious to know what kind of a boy this was, said:

"Well, what do you expect me to give you?"

"Oh, please sir, anything you like." He held a penny towards the boy. There was a smile playing on his face though he pretended to look serious.

"Thank you," said the boy, and was about to run off.

(To be continued)

(For the Weekly Messenger.)

THE SABBATH SCHOOL LESSON.

December 20.

THE GENEROUS INVITATION.—Isaiah lv. i. ii.

The subject matter of these verses may well be called a gracious invitation. The more closely we examine the text the more gracious does the invitation appear. Let us study it, keeping in view the fact that it is given by God, The Creator, Preserver, and Governor of the Universe and is addressed to rebels against this Divine authority.

First, then, this invitation is free, full and unconditional. "Ho every one that thirsteth" come buy without money and without price. No one is excluded no matter how great or many his sins or how completely he may have wrecked himself. He cannot be too poor to buy the best treasures in God's storehouse, see also Rev. xxxi. 17.

Second.—The invitation is not given grudgingly, but is expressed in the most loving words. The God of heaven and earth even condescends to argue with his rebellious creatures; "Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread?" God does not invite us to come back to Him hesitatingly, with fear and trembling, but He promises us in advance an abundant pardon such as the father gave to the Prodigal Son.

Third.—The offer of pardon is but a small part of this gracious invitation. It is only a necessary preliminary to the ratification of

AN EVERLASTING COVENANT

between God and the sinner. This covenant which is called in the third verse of our lesson "The sure mercies of David" is eternal in its very nature because it is unconditional and does not therefore depend upon man's nature, which is essentially changeable. In the previous covenant with Israel in the wilderness God promised to bless the people so long and only so long as they remained faithful to Him, but in this covenant with David this condition is expressly excluded (see Ps. lxxxix. 3, 4, and 27-37). David is here identified with Christ the Son of David in whom God has made an everlasting covenant with all believers, indeed the covenant made with David included and foreshadowed the covenant with Christ, as David was a type of Christ, and it was in Christ that the covenant with David was to be fulfilled. In this eternal covenant God charges Himself not only with the duty of providing an atonement for sin but also with the work of delivering the sinner from the chains of sin. He promises to be the finisher (or perfecter) as well as the author of our faith "Working in us that which is well pleasing in His sight through Jesus Christ", Heb. xii. 2 and xiii. 21. This promise God will perform by writing His laws on our hearts (Jer. xxxi. 31-33), that is by changing our hearts by the power of His Holy Spirit so that we will love God's law instead of loving sinful pleasures. It is this gift of the Holy Spirit, which our Saviour declared to be more valuable to his disciples than even His own personal presence, that is offered so freely in the first verse of our lesson. The water which God offers is living water, and we are told in John vi. 38-39 that this water of life is the Holy Spirit.

A Sabbath School class could scarcely spend an hour better than in looking up and comparing the different forms in which God's invitation to sinners is given and the promises by which that invitation is backed. The lesson might well conclude with the question at the beginning of the second verse "Wherefore?" etc.