

**MEMOIR OF
ROBERT SWAIN**

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Memoir of Robert Swain by Robert Swain

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ROBERT SWAIN

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The Eastman

MEMOIR

OF

ROBERT SWAIN.

NEW YORK
1856

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TO
THE FRIENDS
OF
ROBERT SWAIN,

THIS
MEMORIAL OF HIS LIFE,
NOT PUBLISHED,
AND PRINTED ONLY FOR THEIR USE,
IS
AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED.

MEMOIR.

CHAPTER I.

HIS CHILDHOOD.

ROBERT SWAIN was born in New Bedford, the 21st of February, 1823. His constitution was delicate from the first, without however any decided manifestation of disease, until he was nearly nine years of age. In the autumn of that year, symptoms of an affection of the hip-joint made their appearance, and in a few weeks the inflammation increased, so that every motion of the limb caused him pain. He was then taken to Boston, and, by the advice of an experienced physician, a splint was made to fit the leg, in which, after his return home, it was confined, so as to prevent any movement of the joint; and he was placed on a bed, there to remain fifteen months.

It seemed hard for an active boy to be thus deprived of those out-door plays, which are so great a source of amusement in childhood. In Robert's case, this was only the commencement of a series of sacrifices, which, in one form or another, he was obliged to make throughout his short life. And yet few boys were happier, or enjoyed more than he. His bed was his play-ground. He was always cheerful, never at a loss for amusements. He built and rigged boats, learned to sketch objects from his window, or pieces of furniture in the room, watched the vessels sailing in the harbor, read, played with his parrot and canary birds, or with his young friends who came to see him. He had a great love of flowers, and this was a constant source of pleasure. But his own employments and feelings are best described by himself in some letters, written word for word, at this time, as he dictated them. Their perfect simplicity cannot fail to interest the young, and may teach them how a contented and happy spirit can spread a bright gleam of sunshine though even the chamber of sickness and pain.

TO MISS S. P.

DEAR SOPHIA,

Feb. 1832.

I HAVE got on the splint, and it does not hurt me at all. Father has had a shelf made for me. It has two legs, one on each side of the bed, and the shelf between; and it can be moved close up to me, or farther off, just as I please, and I put all my things on it. Mother went to Mrs. A's. the other day, and she sent me some beautiful flowers. And last evening cousin Mary and Sarah were going to the cotillon party, and Mrs. A. sent each of them a bunch of flowers, to wear in their hair, (O, I was going to say, that I put my flowers in water so that they need not fade,) and when Mary came home, she gave me all her flowers, and altogether they made a very pretty nosegay. There is a beautiful double jilly flower, that smells very sweet indeed; and a rosebud that will bloom very soon, I think, if I keep it in water; and I have got fourteen pretty little daisies. The other day father moved the bed up to the window, and I took the spy-glass, and watched all the boats and ships, till they got out of sight. I have a school, morning and afternoon. Mother keeps school for me in the morning, and Mary in the afternoon. In the

morning I cipher, and have a grammar lesson, and in the afternoon I have history and drawing and spelling. I have made four little boxes, and covered them with pictures. I am making a bead-mark for you, and I shall send it in this letter if I get it done time enough. Every evening father comes up after tea, and plays dominoes with me. I am so happy here, I am almost glad I am lame.

TO THE SAME.

DEAR SOPHIA,

New Bedford, May 25th, 1832.

I HAVE waited a great while for an answer to my letter, but there has not any come; so I thought I would write you again.

Mrs. R. sent me a beautiful little canary bird; he is very tame, and yesterday he came and ate dinner with me. He lit on my waiter, and ate some hominy; and at night he got on the edge of my bowl and drank some milk out of it. We let him out of his cage every morning, and he stays out all day. Yesterday evening, the chamber-door was a little way open, and we thought he had flown out. Father looked up garret and down cellar, and all about the house, and could not find him; and, just as I was going to play a game of dominoes with father, I

saw him upon the window-shutter ; and, a little while after he put his head under his wing to go to sleep, and father caught him, and put him into his cage again ; and he got up on his highest perch and went to sleep, right away. And this morning I let him out of his cage, and he has been flying about all day. I give him chickweed and canary-seed to eat, and water to drink. He likes to light on the window-sash very much. He will get on the table, and look in the looking-glass, and when he sees another little bird there, he makes the prettiest little noise, just as if he was talking to him.

I have beautiful flowers now, that come out of the garden ; and cousin Sally sent me up a calla some time ago, and I put it in water, with my other flowers, and the little bird lit on it very often, and would peck it ; and at last he made so many holes in it, that he spoilt it, and it all withered up, and we were obliged to throw it away. We have some columbines in the garden, and they bear beautiful flowers, that have honey in them ; and mother picks some and brings them into the house, and puts them in water, and the little bird will light on the edge of the glass, and pick off the ends of the flowers that have honey in them. I