

A BIBLE STORY WITHOUT A NAME

1. The early Eastern sun is already flooding with brilliant light a small town perched on a gray mountain ridge, when out of the newly opened gate pass four persons equipped as for a long journey. Days of want have overtaken the people even in that fruitful country-side; and this family (father, mother, and two sons) are to seek plenty in another land. Down the terraced hillside they go, and eastward across the plain, and as they draw nearer that country whose blue mountains they had seen every day from their own hill-top, they pass from the sight of their watching neighbours.

Ten years have come and gone, bringing plenty to the inhabitants of the little town, when one day in the month of April—sowing-time with us, but reaping-time with them—two women are seen toiling up the hill towards the gate. They pass in—an old woman and a young one, seemingly strangers; but ere long, first one neighbour and then another thinks she recognizes the elder of the two visitors, and the question goes round: "Is it—can it be—*she*?" But sorrowfully the woman rejects her former name—"Call me not Happy—call me Bitter." In that foreign land she had buried husband and sons. She that had gone out full had come home again empty and alone, save for her devoted daughter-in-law.

A few weeks later there is a strange scene at the gate of the little town—strange to us, but common with them. Since her arrival, the daughter-in-law, "the Foreigner," as the good folks call her, has gone out into the harvest-fields to work for herself and her chosen mother. There the owner of the fields has seen her, and desires to marry her. So publicly at the gate, in the presence of ten chief men and a general gathering of the villagers, he acquired the right to do so, and received the blessing of all. Thus she who thought herself "empty" became "full" once more, and from being Bitter was again made Happy.

2. The little town lies wrapped in the darkness of night. It has fallen on evil days, for the enemy occupy it, even as their hosts fill the level plains around. But, listen! there are stealthy footsteps. Some one approaches who does not wish to attract attention. And see! they are three armed men drawing near. With great skill and at much risk they have made

their way in safety through the hosts slumbering on the plain, and now they are cautiously climbing the hill road towards the gate. Do they—mighty men though they are—do they think to capture the garrison? At last, when they are close to the gate, they stop at the well which supplies the inhabitants with water. Carefully and noiselessly they lower the vessel into the well and pull it up brimming over; quickly they fill a leather bottle they have brought with them, and then they immediately retrace their steps down the hill. What does it mean? It is a noble incident. "The Foreigner's" descendants have lived on in their native place until now, but her great-grandson has been forced to flee to caves and hiding-places in the mountains because of the jealousy and hatred of the king. In his loneliness and despondency he had cried for a drink of water from the well round which he had played in younger and happier days, and three brave men to whom his wish was law vowed to procure that draught for him. Safely they fulfilled their dangerous task; but when the outlay received their gift, he thought it too dearly won, and so he "poured it out to the Lord."

3. Pass on for a thousand years. Once again it is midnight darkness over the little town. Every house, every available shelter is full, for people have crowded into the village from all parts, yet at this midnight hour there is quiet everywhere. Down in the plains at the bottom of the hill where the shepherds are guarding their flocks against wild beasts, it is, if possible, still more quiet. Suddenly the darkness is dissolved and the intense quiet is broken; a great light illumines all the heavens and an angel of God appears and speaks to the wondering shepherds. Inspired by that angel's message, the shepherds leave their flocks, and climbing the hill, they find, even as they were told, a "babe lying in a manger."

QUESTIONS.

1. Give the names of the "four persons" mentioned above.
2. Show that the daughter-in-law was known as "the Foreigner."
3. Who was her "great-grandson?"
4. Find where a prophet speaks of the little town.
5. Mention any other incident connected with the town not given above.—*Morning Rays.*