

IMPORTUNITY.

He standeth knocking at the door,
 "O Lord! how long? how long?
 Weeping, Thy patience I adore,
 And yet the bars are strong.
 Lord, draw them for me, my hand is weak,
 The night is chill. Enter Thou till the
 streak
 Of ruddy morning flush the day's young
 cheek!"

He standeth knocking, knocking still,
 "Sweet, pleading voice, I hear,"
 The mist is rolling from the hill,
 The fourth slow watch is near.
 Through the small lattice I beheld His face,
 In the cold starlight, full of pitying grace;
 Yet—how to guest Him in so mean a place?

He standeth knocking, knocking loud!
 Yes! for the timbers creak;
 Eastward there looms an angry cloud;
 "Sweet Saviour, hear me speak;
 Oh, hide not there to feel the drenching
 rain!
 I bid Thee welcome, but in grief and pain
 Tell Thee my strength against these bars
 is vain."

He standeth knocking, knocking oft,
 The day of grace wears on,
 The chiding spirit whispers soft
 "Perchance He may be gone
 Whilst thou still lingerest." "Not the bars
 alone
 Keep Thee out, Lord, against the door is
 thrown
 Sand bags of care and hoarded gains and
 stone."

He standeth knocking, knocking faint,
 "Blest Saviour, leave me not;
 But let me tell Thee my complaint,
 The misery of my lot;
 And let me sweep the floor Thy feet must
 press,
 Deck myself royally for Thy caress,
 Make myself worthy ere Thou stoop to
 bless!"

He standeth knocking still,
 "Lord, help me in my doubt,
 Must I put forth this feeble will
 To draw Thee from without?
 Then help my weakness." Hear each stern
 bar give.
 The door flies backward. He but whispers
 "Live!"
 While on His patient breast I weeping,
 plead "Forgive"—*Good Words.*

NO PLACE LIKE HOME.

BY MESBA STRETTON.

CHAPTER V.—TURNED ADRIPT.

The hay-harvest and the corn-harvest, with their long hours of labor in the hot sunshine, passed by and Ruth was one of the busiest of the women working on Chipchase's farm. No one saw much change in her, for she had always been a silent, inoffensive woman, minding her own business, and leaving other folks alone. But when harvest was ended, and the shooting season begun, the term of Ishmael's imprisonment was nearly over. Nutkin and his assistant keepers were very busy about the woods, watching them all night, whilst all day long the crash of guns could be heard far and near. It was not a good time for Ishmael to be coming home; there was too much to put her husband in mind of his threats, and to keep his anger hot against his son. But surely he could not be so hard as to turn Ishmael out of doors when the law let him go free!

"Ishmael's time's up to-morrow," she said, in a tremulous voice one evening, with a deep anxiety she was striving to conceal.

"Aye," answered Humphrey, slowly, "that's what Nutkin says. So I up to the Hall this mornin' early and I says to th' squire, 'Squire, I've been a honest man all my life; and I've worked on your hedges many a year; and I'm not a goin' to harbour no poacher in my home. There's that lad o' mine, that's been a disgrace to me, a-comin' out o' the county gaol to-morrow. He'll never set his foot o'er my door-sill, I promise you.' The squire says, 'As you choose, Humphrey. Go into the kitchen and get a draught o' ale.' And good ale it was; a sight better nor that at the 'Labour in Vain.' I'm not the man to drink the squire's good ale, and go agen him in any way."

"Thou'lt never turn the lad adrift on the world?" cried Ruth.

"Adrift! He's big enough to shift for himself," said Humphrey, doggedly. "The

squire could get us turned out o' here neck and crop, if he chosen; and what 'ud become of me, if we had to go to the workhouse? The squire won't have no poacher harboured close to his woods; and who's to save me from goin' into the House in me old age, eh? Me, as can't live without my drop o' good ale, often and regular. I tasted the beer in the workhouse once. No; Ishmael niver sets his foot o'er that door-sill agen! And now thou knows it, and can make the best on it."

Ruth had a sleepless night again, as if the first bitterness of her sorrow had come back upon her with ten fold power. Early as the dawn came the next morning she was up before it, making a bundle of all Ishmael's coarse clothing, the scanty outfit she had scraped together for him three months ago, when he was going out to earn his own living. Mrs. Chipchase was taking her butter to market in the county town, and had offered to carry Ruth with her in the gig, that she might meet Ishmael at the gate of the county-gaol. She saw little enough of the dusty high road along which they drove, or of the bustling streets thronged with a concourse of market people. It was only when she came within sight of the gaol that she seemed to wake up from a brown study, and get her wits about her again. It stood outside the town, amid green fields; a large square ugly building, surrounded by strong and black stone walls. Small round windows, closely barred and grated, looked out like hoodwinked eyes, over the lonely fields. Ruth felt herself shivering, though the September sun was shining in an unclouded sky, as she looked up, and wondered which one of those gloomy windows had lighted Ishmael's cell. But before she could reach the heavy gate, she saw sauntering down the path from the gaol, creeping with sluggish footsteps, and a bowed-down head, her boy, Ishmael himself.

"Mother," he cried, "mother!" He threw himself into her arms, laughing and crying at the same moment. Ruth could not weep; but she held him fast in her arms, until he lifted up his head to look into her dear face. There was no one near to see them; they were as much alone as in their own quiet woods; only that grim and ugly building looked down upon their meeting with its hollow eyes. She drew him away to a lonely spot under its walls; and they sat down together on the grass, whilst, with her trembling hands, she untied the little packet of home-made bread, baked in their own oven, which she had brought for them to eat together, before they had to part again.

"I never meant any harm, nother," he said, when their meal was over. "I never thought of anything save little Elsie wishing for 'em. But I know it was poaching; and oh, mother it'll turn up against me all my life."

"I'm afeared so, lad," she answered, sighing. "But hast thee asked God's forgiveness, Ishmael?"

"Often and often," he replied, eagerly. "Mother, I never forgot to sing 'Glory to Thee, my God, this night'; only I sang it low, in a whisper, like I used to do when father was at home. I thought you'd be singing it as well, mother."

"Ay," she said softly; "thank God, I could sing it after the first evenin', Ishmael."

"When I get home," he went on, "I'll go up to the hall and ask the squire to forgive me; I'll beg and pray of him; and if he will maybe I can go to work with Mr. Chipchase, like I was to go before I came here."

"He got another waggoners' boy," answered his mother, "and thee'rt not to go home with me, but do thy best away from home. Father won't hear of it; and maybe the squire 'ud get us turned out altogether if thee comes home. But if God has forgiven thee—"

"Not go home with you, mother?" he cried.

"No," she said, half sobbing. "no! But God sees; God knows. Jesus Christ had not where to lay His head; and had to wander about without a home. Ishmael, I want thee to believe that God sees us always; and He loves us, in spite of it seeming as if He didn't take any notice of us. Oh, if I thought God didn't know and didn't care, my heart 'ud break. I'd go down to the river, yonder, and just drown myself. But some day He'll find us a home again, thee and me."

She had never spoken so passionately before, even to him; and he was startled, gazing into her agitated face with wondering eyes. Then he looked back at the dreary gaol, his last dwelling place. There

seemed to be no place for him in the whole world now he had been in there.

"Where can we find a home again, mother?" he asked at last; "there's no place like home."

"Up there!" she said, lifting her dim eyes to the great sky above them, "if God gives us no other home here in this world, He's got one ready there for thee and me. 'Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in Me. In my Father's house are many mansions; I go to prepare a place for you.' That's what Jesus said. He's preparing a place for us, Ishmael; and we must not trouble our hearts too much. Only we must go on believing in Him."

"I'll try, mother," he said, putting his hand in hers; and they sat there, not speaking much, but with hands closely clasped, till the chiming of the church clocks in the town behind them reminded Ruth there was still something to be done. A place must be found for Ishmael to sleep in that night; and if possible to stay at till he could get work to do.

It was hard work leaving him, so far away from her, to loiter about the streets and pick up any stray job that might fall in the way of a boy with a doubtful character. Her mother's heart told her but too plainly how precarious such a life must be. Only a few months ago he was still a child; even yet in happier homes he would be reckoned among the children, to be punished indeed for his faults, but not to be thrust into want and temptation. But Ishmael was to fight in the thickest of the battle, bereft of his good name, and removed from all good companionship. Yet Ruth had hope and faith. She worked harder than ever, never taking a day's rest, that she might save a few pence every week to send to his help. She knew he was almost always hungry; often pinched with cold; ragged and nearly barefoot at all times; scarcely able to pay for a shelter night after night. He roamed about the country from farmstead to farmstead, doing any odd work the farmers would trust him with, and sleeping in any outhouse or broken shed he could find open. But he failed in getting a settled place; there were too many boys of good character who wanted to set their foot on the first step of the ladder.

There was one thing he could not make up his mind to do. He could not put such a distance between himself and his mother as would prevent him seeing her every Sunday. He never failed to steal homewards at the close of the week, lurking about the lime-kiln or the woods, in hiding from his father, until he could make his presence known to his mother. It was the great solace and enjoyment of her life. She could still wash and mend his clothes for him, and get him a sufficient meal or two, and listen to all that had happened to him during the week. He never crossed the threshold of his old home; but on summer evenings Ruth and he sat together within the tangle of green brushwood behind it, and on winter nights they sheltered themselves under the walls of the old kiln, or, if they needed a roof over their heads, they met in the limestone cave, which most often of all was Ishmael's sleeping place.

CHAPTER VI.—FIVE YEARS.

So five years went on, and still Ishmael was not a man. There was little hope now of his ever making a strong, hardy, capable man. The privations he was compelled to undergo had told upon his under-sized, thin, and feeble frame. But still more had the anxieties and the mortifications he had to endure borne down his spirit. No one but his mother cared for him. Suspicion dogged him, and the doubtful companions necessity forced upon him strengthened suspicion. He was losing heart, and growing hopeless. His mother had called him Ishmael, because the Lord had heard her affliction; but she might have called him Ishmael, because every man's hand was against him. Would the day come, dreaded by his mother, when his hand would be against every man?

The last few years had weighed more heavily upon Ruth than ten might have done if Ishmael had been at home. She could no longer help her old husband up the ladder, when he came home drunk; and many a night he had lain on the damp floor, groaning with rheumatic pains, for want of a strong young arm such as Ishmael's would have been. Still every Sunday brought her a gleam of gladness. As yet Ishmael had not gone astray amid his manifold temptations; and she was

comforted for her own sorrow and his. But what would become of him when she was no longer there?

It was a hard trial to her, when she heard Ishmael's call, plaintive and low, sounding round and round the hut through the stillness of a winter's night, and she could not answer it. It came nearer and nearer, until it seemed as if it was under the very eaves; but if her husband was crouching over the fire, she dared not even open the door to look out. In the black darkness outside the little casement she could see for a moment the dim outline of her boy's white face gazing through the lattice panes; and then the long, low, plaintive cry grew fainter, and died away in the woods behind.

"I must tell Nutkin o' that owl," said old Humphrey peevishly.

At last Ruth could go out no more to her hard work, but lay still and almost helpless in her close loft, scarcely able to creep down the ladder to the hearth below. Old Humphrey could not understand that she was no longer the willing drudge she had been so long. That she should get free from him by death never once crossed his dull brain, saddened by drink. Mary a mean he made over his wife's idleness in the sanded kitchen of the "Labor in Vain," where he sat now on a corner of a bench farthest from the fire, having only a few pence to spend; he who in better days had been welcome to the best seat, and been most lavish with his money.

But whenever Sunday came new life seemed to visit Ruth. Whence the strength arose she could not tell; but it never failed her when she rose up from her bed, and crept downstairs, and out into the spring sunshine to meet Ishmael. Everybody knew now, except Humphrey, that Ishmael haunted the old home where his mother was dying; but they took no notice except by carrying food, as they said, for old Ruth, though they knew well she could not eat it. Some of the women offered to do any washing they could for her, and made no remark when Ishmael's clothing was among it. For when we are going down visibly into the dark valley of the shadow of death, those around us look upon us with other eyes, and press upon us some of the kindness and tenderness which would have made all the pilgrimage of life only a happy journey. Ruth, so long a solitary and sorrowful woman, wondered at the friendliness which gathered about her in her last days.

"It makes home seem sweeter," she said to Ishmael, "to have plenty o' friends, and plenty o' everything else. But if it had always been so I might never ha' thought as dyin' was like goin' home. I always think as if heaven were my only home now, Ishmael," she added, a faint smile lighting up her wrinkled face.

She was sitting beside him on the old door-sill for the last time, though that they did not know. For when death is drawing near to any one of us we do not always know that the last time is come for the old familiar duties and habits of every day life. It had been a long sunny day in May, but now the twilight was coming on, and every minute made her beloved face more thin and shadowy.

"I feel a most," she went on faltering, "like when I was a little girl, and 'ud hear father callin' me in from my play. I'm partly afeared to say it, Ishmael; but it's sometimes as if I could hear the blessed Lord callin', 'Ruth, come to Me, and ye shall find rest.' And last night I answered Him out loud. 'Lord, I can't rest because of my lad Ishmael.' And it seemed to me as if there came a low quiet, voice whispering to me, 'Leave Ishmael to Me. He is My son.' And I said to myself, 'The Lord has heard my affliction again.'"

(To be Continued).

"What was wanting," asked a Hindu mother of her only son, who recently embraced Christianity, "what was wanting to you in our house that you left us?" "God and a religion were wanting," was the reply. And such is the feeling of multitudes of young men around us to day. There are 10,000 gods so called, and yet no God; there are scores of religious systems, and yet no religion. A God and a religion for India! None of the old shams will be accepted, none of the new figments will satisfy. Christians, give them your God, and his religion—"God in Christ reconciling the world unto himself."