

"THE CHILDREN LAUGHED
AND SANG"

(From Chambers' Journal)

It was in the chill December
That the Angel of Death came by,
And he rustled his wings of darkness
As he swept through the wintry sky;
A household of happy creatures
Dwelt quiet, and free from care,
And the Angel stole in softly,
And stood all silent there.
(But the children laughed and sang at their
play;
Never a fear nor a pang had they.)
And the Angel swiftly in silence
Struck home the mortal blow,
And in the wintry morning
He laid the father low;
And wildly the sorrowful mother,
Bewildered and stunned with woe,
Wailed in her lone bereavement,
And wished that she, too, might go!
(But the children laughed and sang at
their play;
Never a fear nor a pang had they.)

Cold in the lonely chamber
Lay the father's form at rest,
And they laid the delicate flower wreaths
Upon his quiet breast;
And forth from his home they bore him,
And hid him from sound and sight,
And they heaped the cold earth above
him
While the children's feet trod light.
(But the boys went home to their happy
play;
Never a fear nor a pang had they.)

And often the childish footsteps
Are turned to their father's grave
Where the grass, with its glistening
hoar-frost,
Lies o'er that heart so brave;
And sometimes they watched their
mother
Bending in sorrow and pain;
And they say in their childish voices:
"Will papa never come again?"
(But soon they laugh and sing at their play
Never a fear nor a pang have they.)

So God in His infinite pity
Shuts the eyes of the children dear,
And they see not the fell Destroyer,
Though their eyes are so bright and
clear.
And I said: "There's no Past for the
children,
With its terrible pangs and stings;
And for them no brooding Future
Spreadeth its threatening wings.
All they see is the Present—To-day;
And so they laugh and sing at their play."

NO PLACE LIKE HOME.

BY HESHA STRETTON.

CHAPTER IV.—THE MAGISTRATES' MEET-
ING.

Uptown was not worthy of the name of town; it could hardly be called a large village. But it was the centre of a wide agricultural district, and a small market was held in it once a week, chiefly for the sale of butter and eggs, as the farmers carried their corn to a more important market farther away, in the county-town. A magistrates' meeting was held at Uptown at stated intervals; and there was a police-station just outside the village, provided with two cells but seldom occupied, in one of which Ishmael had been safely kept since noon-day on Saturday.

Heavy-hearted still, though with a fund of secret courage bearing her up, Ruth entered Uptown on the Monday morning. There was more stir than usual about the single street, as there always was on the days when the magistrates came to hear the trivial cases which awaited their judgment. Round the inn where the justices' room was, there were several groups of somewhat discreditable folks hanging about in readiness. Nutkin was in the inn-yard, eagerly talking to one of the magistrates who had arrived before the others, and had just dismounted. Ruth saw him, but it was as if she did not see him, so absorbed was her whole soul in watching for Ishmael to come along the road between the town and the police-station. She was half-unconscious of the increasing crowd and stir, as the magistrates rode in one after another; and the magistrates' clerk bustled down from his house with his blue bag full of papers. Mrs. Clift had arrived too with Elsie; and Squire Lansdowne had gone into the large room of the inn; but she only half knew it. At last Ishmael appeared, walking beside

a policeman, who kept his hand lightly on his collar as if to remind him it was of no use to try to escape. But could this sullen, scowling bud, with rough, uncombed hair, and tear-stained face, be Ishmael? He was close beside her, yet he never raised his eyes; and he would have passed her by, if she had not cried out in a very lamentable voice, "Oh, Ishmael, Ishmael!"

"It's my mother," he said, as the policeman tightened his grasp of his collar. "Don't you come inside, mother dear. It 'ud do no good, and it 'ud make me cry. You go home again now you've seen me to say good-bye. You'll loose me to kiss my mother," he added, looking at the policeman.

"Aye, if you're sharp about it," he answered.

For a moment the young boy, scarcely more than a child, and the bent, grey-haired woman stood with their arms fondly clinging about each other. Ruth felt as if she could not let him go; it seemed but a few days since he was but a baby in her bosom; and now he was a prisoner-charged with an offence against the laws of his country. But Ishmael loosened his hands, and let himself be led away inside the magistrates' room. Then she sat down on the lowest step of a horse-block below its open window, through which she could hear the hum of voices coming indistinctly to her ear. How long it was she did not know, but a gaily dressed, flaunting young woman came to her at length, and spoke in a pitying tone.

"Don't you take on, Mrs. Medway," she said; "you're a good woman, I know, but luck's agen you. Nutkin was very hard on him; and they've give him three months in the county-gaol."

"Is it my Ishmael?" she asked, looking up with a wandering and vacant expression in her eyes.

"To be sure," answered the young woman. "Ishmael Medway, thirteen years of age; three months for stealing pheasants' eggs."

Ruth heard no more, saw nothing more. But bending forward, as if to lift herself upon her feet, she fell heavily on the pavement, in a deep swoon. There was a crowd clustering about her when Ishmael was marched out of the inn by the policeman; he looked round in vain for a last glance at his mother's face.

"It were best for her to go away," he said to himself, with a sob, "but I should ha' liked to ha' seen her again."

He felt as if he was going to die in the prison to which they were sending him; and as if he should never see his mother's face again. His young soul was in a bewilderment of grief and amazement. He had heard himself described as an incorrigible thief and poacher. Everything had gone against him: the notorious character of his father and elder brothers; his own admission of having haunted the woods until he knew every spot in them; even his tearful confession that he knew he had no right to the eggs, and did not know why he should take them then for the first time. All had been against him. He was going away to gaol, a shame and disgrace to his poor mother. To-day too; the very day he was to have begun to earn his own living, and relieve her from the burden he had been upon her. He would be a worse trouble to her than any of the others had been, even than his father, who came home every night either drunk or angry. What could he ever do to make it up to her now? He could do nothing better than to die.

It was late before Ruth reached home in the evening and she found her husband awaiting her return, sober and sullen; a hard, tyrannical old man, who looked upon her as a silent and spiritless drudge.

"So," he exclaimed, as she stepped feebly and wearily over the threshold, "this is what it's come to; thy fine lad's got hisself into gaol. 'Tis comes o' book-learnin' and psalm singin', eh? He brings shame on all on us. Ne'er a one on us was iver up afore the justices till now; and they say at the 'Labour in Vain' as he's got three months. And serve him right, I say. I takes sides with Nutkin, and the squire, and the justices, as are ivery one on 'em gentlemen. If I'd a bit o' land, I'd hang ivery poacher as set foot on it. And a young, little lad o' his age! What'll he be when he's a man? I'd ha' sent him to Botany Bay, I would. I'm on the side o' justice. And if iver Ishmael crosses o'er that door-sill agen, I'll thresh him to within an inch o' his life. I'll break ivery bone in his body. And thine, too," he shouted, with growing fury, "if thee don't open

that cursed mouth o' thine, and say some-thing!"

"I'm ill, Humphrey," she answered meekly; "I swooned away dead, when they told me on it."

"Swooned!" he repeated, sneeringly, "don't tell me. It's only born ladies as can do that, not a workin' woman like thee. But swoond or no swoond, just hearken to my words. Ishmael niver sets his foot over yon door-sill. I'll harbour no poachers or gaol-birds under my roof."

Very quietly Ruth went on lighting the fire, and boiling the kettle. It was a relief to her to be at home again, out of the stir and buzz of the little town, and out of sight of inquisitive eyes. Even her husband's threats and jeers could not altogether spoil the sense of having found rest at her own fireside. And when he was gone, the unbroken silence of the dark hut suited her. Her harassed soul could re-collect itself. Even in dense darkness her eyes by eager gazing begin to see a little, and so in the deepest trouble the soul by its earnest yearning towards God, begins to discern light. As Ruth sat alone in the dark hut, there came back to her memory the old story in the Bible, from which she had taken a name for her youngest boy. She thought of Hagar in the wilderness, a runaway slave, fleeing from her mistress, and how God heard her affliction; and how once more she was driven into the wilderness, wandering up and down homeless, until her son Ishmael was dying of thirst, and his mother cast him under a shrub to die, and went away out of sight—a good way off—lest she should see the death of her child; and how God heard the voice of the lad, and once again sent His angel to succour Hagar. Ruth shut her aching and swollen eyelids with a feeling of comfort and awe, as she whispered, "Thou, God, seest me."

Yes, God saw; God knew. There was unspeakable consolation in that. She felt no bitterness of heart, even against Nutkin. She had nothing to say against the law that had sent Ishmael to prison. She did not try to justify her boy; he had done wrong, though in lightheartedness and thoughtlessness, not in malice.

None of these things occupied her simple mind. God had seen all; and He knew all about it. It was in that thought she was to find consolation and strength. She must endure, as seeing Him who is invisible.

(To be continued.)

ECONOMY IN READING.

The long winter evenings and the dull days give much opportunity for readings. A few practical suggestions on how to make the most of the time devoted to it, may not be considered inappropriate. Time and the power of application are limited, and it is important that a true economy of both should be practised. But this cannot be left to chance; it must be thought out and closely followed. The objects attainable by reading are knowledge, mental and moral improvement, and pleasure. It is to be regretted that so few have any motive in reading other than amusement; and that books which weaken the power of reason and pollute the imagination are too often the only books sought by them. Studious persons can find in the newspapers, the better class of magazines, the purer works of imagination, and in the writings of poets and travellers, all that they need for pleasure and intellectual recreation. They may be benefited by hints concerning a correct theory of reading, just as temperate and prudent persons will learn from a judicious discussion of the subject of food and digestion, though drunkards and gourmands care nothing for it.

To be well-informed, a man must be acquainted with the outlines of the history and the civil and political geography of the world, and of its various forms of religion and government. He must, also, be minutely versed in the history of his own country and of the Christian religion. He must be familiar with the literature of his own language, and to a considerable extent with the best works in the literature of other languages. He must know the meaning of the different sciences, and their

fundamental facts and principles. If he does not know these things, he cannot be said to be well-informed. He may be a fluent talker, but is liable at any moment, though unconscious of it himself, to be exposed to the contempt of the well-read.

What is this information to be obtained? Much of it can and should be obtained in school and college; but it has been demonstrated very often that persons may be graduated from the best institutions, and be grossly ignorant of many of these things. Much of it may be derived from conversation, newspapers, lectures, sermons, and political addresses, and collected by observation. Hence many who read no books, or but few, appear unusually intelligent. The defect in such cases is, that their knowledge is fragmentary, and that they believe and utter, without being aware of it, many absurd and untrue things. A true theory of reading for intellectual improvement should recognize these conditions.

A young man or woman, whether graduated or not, may be benefited by a course of reading substantially identical. It should include two distinct lines—one historic and the other scientific. Let it begin with any good outline history, of which the dates and principal events should be committed to memory; then a volume of lectures, such as Tytler's, may follow. Next may be taken Smith's "History of the Ancient World"; then Gibbon's Unabridged, with notes; then Hallam's "Middle Ages"; finally, a good history of England, such as Green's full work, and the best and most detailed history of his own country. These should be read slowly, say thirty to fifty pages per day. Meanwhile, he can be reading a popular work on science at another hour, or on alternate days. If he like science, let him task himself on history; or if he like history, let him task himself on science, according to Bacon's famous suggestion. Such a course will, in three years, carry the reader over a vast field, and not require more than one hour per day. It is desirable to mark striking passages, and before relinquishing the volume, to read them slowly again. It is valuable to make an outline of the contents of every book read. We have found this a great help to understanding and memory, even though we never referred to the outlines again. As the course progresses, light is reflected on many allusions seen in contemporaneous literature, and heard in sermons and addresses, and in conversation. The great point we urge is, that it should be systematically pursued. Fifty pages a day for six days makes 300 a week; 300 per week are more than 15,000 per year. Useful books are not read and mastered by chance. Nineteenths of contemporary publications are not worth reading at all.

Another principle must be, never to pass a page without comprehending it. Coleridge said, "Force yourself to reflect on what you read, paragraph by paragraph." Montaigne says, "I do not bite my nails about the difficulties I meet with in my reading, after a charge or two I give them over." The precept of Coleridge is wisdom; the declaration of Montaigne is folly. It is as useless to read that which is not understood as to eat that which is not digested.

We would recommend to the reader by course that he take about one day in six for an intellectual excursion. Those who always make up haphazard excursions seldom learn much of value. Those who work wholly by course become dull. Five days to the course, one day for random reading, Sunday for special devotional reading, study, and good works, will make a man learned, even if he give but an hour a day to his six days' work. If a person, already quite well informed, will pass over this course, two things will follow: he will