

RUTH THE GLEANER

by William M. Taylor

Taylor's expository study of the Book of Ruth examining themes of emigration, bereavement, redemption, and God's providential care, with detailed historical and cultural context of the period of the Judges.

6 Chapters

Table of Contents

1. 00.1 Forward
2. 01 Emigration and Bereavement (Ruth 1:1-5)
3. 02 Return and Reception (Ruth 1:6-22)
4. 03 Gleaning (Ruth 2:1-17)
5. 04 The Threshing Floor (Ruth 2:18-Ruth 3:18)
6. 05 The Loving Marriage (Ruth 4)

00.1 Forward

FORWORD The Bible Biography books by William M. Taylor remain unexcelled in their field. The author speaks of these outstanding Bible personalities with warmth, zest, and penetrating insight. He writes of them as they were, without magnifying their excellencies, or apologizing for their faults. At the same time he repeatedly points out the lessons from their lives for life in our day and age. The contents of these books consist mainly of the exposition, defense, and application of the Scriptural narrative. It was said that Taylor's sermons were so constructed that every sentence was a definite step toward his goal. This is true of the chapters in these books. The style is such as to inspire any preacher or speaker. The result is an outstanding homiletical and expository series of biographical sermons with warm and spiritual applications. These books furnish excellent material for series preaching.

William M. Taylor was born, educated and ordained in Scotland. He was one of the greatest preachers of his day. He is especially known for his expository writings on the parables and miracles. At the age of 42 years Taylor came to America, and for twenty years was the famed preacher of the Broadway Tabernacle in New York City. He was Lyman Beecher lecturer in Yale Seminary and L. P. Stone lecturer in Princeton Seminary. He was a preacher in the front rank, and enjoyed an international reputation. He died in 1902. THE PUBLISHERS

01 Emigration and Bereavement (Ruth 1:1-5)

CHAPTER I EMIGRATION AND BEREAVEMENT

Ruth 1:1-5. This little book of four chapters is unique among the treasures of the Word of God. It is unlike every other portion of Holy Scripture; and yet it has on it the stamp of inspiration which is common to them all. Exquisite in its pastoral simplicity, and valuable for the glimpses which it gives us into the common life of the Jewish people at the time to which it refers, it is also deeply interesting to the devout reader, from its relation to one who was an ancestries of David, and of David's greater Son, and from the lessons of love and constancy and purity and integrity which it so abundantly suggests. Withal, however, it is questionable whether it receives from us the amount of attention to which it is entitled. It is said that Dr. Franklin was once in the company of several ladies of the English nobility, when the conversation turned upon pastoral poetry. The ladies took a considerable part in the discussion, and after hearing their criticisms on various authors, the doctor offered to read the translation of a pastoral for their amusement. He read, with a few verbal alterations, the Book of Ruth. They were enraptured, pronounced it the finest they had ever heard from any language, and insisted upon knowing whose it was. Imagine their confusion when he gravely told them that he had read it from the Bible. I do not vouch for the truth of the story, though I found it in a reliable place enough; (The Biblical Treasury, by J. Cowper Gray, vol. iii., p. 171.) I find, however, in the preface to The Beautiful Gleaner, by the late Rev. William Braden, that the same story is told of Dr. Samuel Johnson, and on internal grounds it is, perhaps, more likely to be true of him than of Franklin but though few of us, perhaps, could be so thoroughly imposed on now, I question whether any of us could give at once a clear and concise account of the story that is here told, brief as it is, and I am sure that very few of us have bestowed upon it that measure of attention which is needful for the bringing out from it of the lessons which it was designed to teach. We may, therefore, spend very profitably, as well as pleasantly, a few Sabbath evenings in studying it together. In modern editions of the Hebrew Scriptures, the Book of Ruth is placed among the Hagiographa, which is the third division of the Old Testament writings, and which consists of the five rolls or Megilloth, the three poetical books (Job, Proverbs, and Psalms), and the two books of Chronicles. Ruth is one of the Megilloth, of which the others were the Song of Songs, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Esther. These books were so called because, for convenient use at the festival on which it was read in the synagogue, each was written on a separate roll. That of Esther was styled Megillah or the roll, by way of eminence, and was read on the Feast of Purim, whose origin it describes. That of Ruth was read at Pentecost, or the Feast of Weeks, perhaps because it contains so graphic a delineation of Boaz and his reapers in the harvest field. But this division into separate rolls was probably a mere liturgical arrangement, for the Septuagint, or Greek version of the Old Testament, places Ruth between Judges and 1 Samuel, as we have it in our English Bibles. Some, following the authority of Josephus, have alleged that it was originally incorporated with the Book of Judges. That, however, has been much disputed, and the general opinion now is that it has always been a distinct and separate portion of the Old Testament Canon, and that it is placed where we have it because it forms a fitting

introduction to the books which tell of the glory of King David's reign. The date of its composition cannot be determined with precision. Some have gone so far as to put it after the Captivity, and would ascribe its authorship to Ezra, or Nehemiah, on the ground of certain Chaldaic forms of expression which they allege they have detected in it. But it is remarkable that these all occur in the reported conversations which the book contains, and not in the narrative portions--a fact which suggests that they were probably due to some peculiarity of dialect not yet satisfactorily accounted for; and in any case they cannot outweigh the great improbability that a book which tells, without extenuation or apology, how a Bethlehemite like Boaz married a Moabitish woman, should be produced at the very time when such alliances were so bitterly denounced by the Jewish leaders. From an examination of the book itself, it seems clear that while it could not have been written earlier than David's day, because it contains two references to David himself, it could not have been composed much, if any, later, else it would have contained the name of Solomon in the genealogical table with which it closes.

Again, the tone of the book throughout is liberal and tolerant to the Gentiles; and part of its design--unconsciously to its author, perhaps, but not the less intentional with God--seems to be to prepare for the time when through the promised Messiah the middle wall of partition between the Jews and other nations should be broken down. Now the reign of David appears to have been the only portion of Jewish history during which such a spirit towards the Gentiles was shown without any breach of loyalty to Jehovah. David himself in his public administration was "the man according to God's own heart;" and yet as one has suggestively said, "nothing is more characteristic of him and his time, though it is a characteristic too commonly overlooked, than the fair and easy terms on which he met all foreigners, and the rare fidelity with which friendly aliens clave to his cause, even when it was a losing cause." (Samuel Cox, in *The Expositor*, vol. ii., pp. 8, 9.) This fact, therefore, taken in connection with the personal relation of David to the heroine of the story, seems to make it, if not absolutely certain, at least fairly probable, that the Book of Ruth was written some time during David's reign, and we know that the Royal Psalmist had contemporaries who, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, might have produced such a work. Indeed, there is much in the simple pathos of the parable of the ewe lamb to remind us of the idyllic beauty of the Book of Ruth, and though we have not anywhere met with the opinion, both might well enough have come from the prophet Nathan. As to the date of the events recorded in this book all we know is that they happened "in the days when the Judges ruled." But as to how long the time of the Judges lasted, or which of them are particularly referred to in the opening verse of Ruth, we are again in the dark. For it is not yet settled among critics whether we must regard the Judges as so many magistrates having jurisdiction over the whole land, and ruling consecutively from Othniel to Eli; or whether we must view them as local leaders, each restricted to some one particular neighborhood, and some of whom may have been contemporaries. Lord Arthur Hervey, for example, believes that Ehud, Gideon, and Jephthah flourished at the same time; while others suppose that the book, up at least to the end of the sixteenth chapter, is to be regarded as a continuous history of events strictly following one another. So, with this diversity of view existing, it is difficult to fix upon any one judge as that under whose administration Boaz lived. But if we may presume that the genealogical table at the end of Ruth is without a break, so far at least as the steps between Boaz and David are concerned, then as Boaz was the great-grandfather of David, we may not greatly err if we conclude that the incidents here recorded occurred at a date somewhere between one hundred and one hundred and fifty years prior to the days of David. But

now, leaving all preliminaries, let us enter upon the book itself. It tells a short and simple story of family trial deepening into the darkness of repeated bereavement, and then breaking out into the brightness of a joy which is all the more delightful by reason of the gloom that went before. The household was composed of Elimelech and his wife Naomi, with their two sons, Mahlon and Chilion. Like all Hebrew names these are significant, but whether we are to consider them as prophetic is quite another matter, though in at least two of the cases their appropriateness is remarkable. Elimelech is "My God the King," or "My God is King." Naomi is "sweet," or, perhaps, an abbreviation for "God is sweet," while Mahlon is "sickness," and Chilion is "consumption"--names which might well enough have been given to the boys because of the perception in them by their parents of some delicacy of constitution, although other scholars prefer to interpret them as denoting "mildness of disposition" and "beautiful completeness," and one would think that parents would more naturally connect these ideas with their children than seek to perpetuate in their names the associations of physical debility. The home of this family was in Bethlehem-Judah, so called to distinguish it from another place of the same name in the territory of the tribe of Zebulun, but now needing no such particular designation, since it is to us forever memorable as the birthplace of the Lord Jesus Christ. It was little among the thousands of Judah, and up till this time, with the exception of the fact, that near it was the grave of Rachel, there had been nothing about it to make it specially attractive to the people of the land. Rather it had acquired, if anything, an unenviable notoriety among the tribes, for out of it had gone the Levite, who had settled as a household priest with Micah in Mount Ephraim, and had been carried off by the Danites to Laish, where he ministered at the altar which these early idolaters had set up. (See Judges 17:1-13; Judges 18:1-31; Judges 19:1-30) To it, also, had belonged the ill-fated woman whose cruel treatment by the men of Gibeah led to the almost utter extinction of the tribe of Benjamin by the rest of the Israelites. If, therefore, nothing more had been told us concerning it than what is contained in these two strange episodes of Jewish history, which are to be found in the concluding chapters of the Book of Judges, we might have supposed that no good thing could come out of Bethlehem. But how far that would have been from the truth the Book of Ruth makes evident, and we are thereby warned of the danger of judging of the character of a place from one or two particularly unpleasant incidents in its history. Indeed, when we come, in a rural district like that of Bethlehem, and in such an age, upon a quiet, unaffected, simple, pure, and holy home life, like that which is here portrayed, we feel that we must not speak of the days of the Judges too unqualifiedly, as if they had been characterized by constant strife and universal defection from the service of God. And, in any case, after reading this history, we are not so surprised as we otherwise would have been, that the sweet singer of Israel, the "darling" of his people, and the leader of psalmody for God's children of all succeeding centuries, should have sprung from such a stock. The town itself is about six miles south of Jerusalem, a little to the east of the road that leads to Hebron. It stands upon the summit and slopes of a narrow ridge which projects eastward from the central chain of the Judaeian mountains. The sides of the hill below the town are carefully terraced, and even in modern times they are covered with fertile vineyards; while in the valleys beneath, and on a little plain to the eastward, there are cornfields whose produce, perhaps, gave the name Bethlehem, or House of Bread, to the place with which they are connected. It was well watered, and its other and older name Ephratah ("the fruitful") was probably bestowed because of the fertility of the district in the midst of which it stood. But withal it was not proof against the ravages of famine, and at the time at which our story opens that great affliction was upon the

people. Perhaps the former and latter rains had not fallen, and the usual consequences had followed. But whatever was the cause, there was "cleanness of teeth" in all the borders of the land; even in the House of Bread there was scarcity, and the pressure was so sore upon Elimelech and his wife that to escape its miseries they went with their two sons to the land of Moab. The usual resort of the Israelites in time of famine was Egypt; but probably on this occasion the way thither was barred by insuperable obstacles, and so the members of this household betook themselves to Moab, a district which lay to the south and east of the Dead Sea, and comprised the southern half of the high table-lands which rise above the lake. "On every side it was strongly fortified by nature. On the north was the tremendous chasm of the Arnon. On the west it was limited by the precipices, or, more accurately, the cliffs, which descend almost perpendicularly to the shore of the lake, and are intersected only by one or two steep and narrow passes. Lastly, on the south and east it was protected by a half-circle of hills, which open only to allow the passage of the Arnon and another of the torrents which descend to the Dead Sea."(Smith's Bible Dictionary, s. v. Moab) It was, therefore, not very far from Bethlehem. Indeed, its blue mountains are said to be "distinctly visible from the Mount of Olives and the heights above Bethlehem. " But it was remarkable for general fertility, for Mr. Grove tells us that "the whole country is undulating, and, after the general level of the plateau is reached, without any serious inequalities; and in this and the absence of conspicuous vegetation has a certain resemblance to the downs in the southern counties of England." And, again, gathering up the different references to it in the prophetic books, he says, "With a metaphor which well expresses at once the pastoral wealth of the country and its commanding, almost regal, position, but which cannot be conveyed in a translation, Moab is depicted as the strong scepter, the beautiful staff whose fracture will be bewailed by all about him and by all who know him. In his cities we discern a great multitude of people living in 'glory' and in the enjoyment of great 'treasure;' crowding the public squares, the house-tops, and the ascents and descents of the numerous high places and sanctuaries, where the 'priests and princes' of Chemosh or Baal-Peor minister to anxious devotees. Outside the town lie 'the plentiful fields' luxuriant as the renowned Carmel--the vineyards and gardens of 'summer fruits'--the harvest is being reaped, and the 'hay stored in abundance,' the vineyards and the presses are crowded with peasants gathering and treading the grapes, the land resounds with the clamor of the vintagers."(J. Merinos, on Ruth, in Pulpit Commentary)

Here, therefore, there was every probability of finding plenty, and as Elimelech and his family did not stay in Bethlehem until they were utterly impoverished by the famine, but "went out full," they would have the means of availing themselves, for a time at least, of the abundance by which they were surrounded. But it was an idolatrous land; and the question has been keenly discussed whether or not Elimelech committed sin in leaving the Land of the Covenant for such a territory, even under the pressure of famine. Many blame him very severely, and do not hesitate to affirm that the afflictions which subsequently came upon his household were judgments inflicted on him for his transgression. Others, again, fully vindicate him for his conduct, and grow eloquent over emigration as a remedy for famine. But where the record is silent it does not become us to be dogmatic on such a matter, :although every one will recognize how full of spiritual peril it must have been to take two young men like Mahlon and Chilion into the midst of idolatry; and it will be with all a question whether it was wise to run such risk to their souls, simply for the sake of obtaining sustenance for their bodies. The relation of the covenant people to the Promised Land was, of course, peculiar; and the more that was recognized, the more loath would they be for any

reason to forsake it for another. Yet, as we see in David's placing of his parents under the care of the King of Moab, exceptional circumstances might be held as justifying a temporary sojourn elsewhere; and it is obvious from the language here employed that Elimelech did not mean to leave Bethlehem "for good and all," but expected to return thither after the famine had ceased. But whatever may be said regarding his conduct in this instance, we have no hesitation in approving of emigration as one of the best means of furnishing relief for overcrowded countries, and opening up new fields for industry and enterprise; and it is not without a smile over the commentary which two hundred years have written on his words that we read the remarks of quaint old Thomas Fuller, which we find in his fragment on the Book of Ruth, this question and this land, to the following effect: "Now, if any do demand of me my opinion concerning our brethren which of late left this kingdom to advance a plantation in New England, surely I think as St. Paul said concerning virgins, he had 'received no commandment of the Lord,' so I cannot find any just warrant to encourage men to undertake this removal; but think rather the counsel best that King Joash prescribed to Ahaziah, 'Tarry at home.' Yet as for those that are already gone, far be it from us to conceive them to be such to whom we may not say 'Godspeed;' but let us pity them, and pray for them, for sure they have no need of our mocks, which have too much of their own miseries. I conclude, therefore, of the two Englands what our Savior saith of the two wines, 'No man having tasted of the old, presently desireth the new; for he saith the old is better.'" In the light of subsequent history this is now rather amusing, and reading it here in New York one feels very much as he does when sitting on the deck of an ocean steamer he comes, in some volume of entertaining anecdotes, upon the famous demonstration of the eminent engineer, who declared it to be impossible for any steamship to cross the Atlantic. At the same time we must not lose sight of the fact that in all emigrations, whether from one land to another, or from East to West in this our own land, regard must be had to the spiritual surroundings as well as to the physical advantages, and we ought to remember that even the highest worldly prosperity is all too dearly purchased by the loss of the soul. But though Elimelech escaped famine by moving to Moab, he could not escape death. The last enemy has many more avenues to the center of life in us than that of starvation. Even in the midst of plenty the summons came which said "thy soul is required of thee," and he could not disobey. So Naomi was left a widow among strangers, with her two sons. How she must have missed the friends and neighbors of Bethlehem in her time of trial! The aliens, we may believe, were kind to her; but in the night of sorrow there are no friends like home friends, especially those of our own kindred. Many drawings must her heart have felt to the old home; but for some reason, not here even suggested, the way thither was closed against her, and she remained some years longer in Moab--so long, indeed, that her sons seem almost to have given up the expectation of return, and married daughters of the land. Perhaps that, too, was a trial to Naomi; but as throughout the story she acts always in a prudent way, it is certain that she would do so in this also. She did not break her head or her heart by rushing against the inevitable; but accepting that which she could not prevent, she sought to make the best of it; and she succeeded so well that her case stands out a perpetual protest against the silly, unfeeling, and, as I believe, unjust sneers that are so constantly thrown at the mother-in-law in the household. She and they dealt kindly and truly with each other, and so they grew into each other's confidence and affection. It is hard for a mother to see another come between her son and herself, and there is danger lest she should treat her as a usurper; but the true specific for all such cases is that which Naomi and her sons' wives employed, the "dealing kindly and truly with" each other. Love is the universal

solvent, especially when it is rooted in the common love of all to Christ, and when it manifests itself in mutual fidelity, not simply in the dealing kindly, but also in the dealing truly with each other.

But, alas, the happiness of the sons in their wives, and of the mother in her daughters-in-law, was not of long continuance, for ere long, perhaps owing to some inherited delicacy from their father, Mahlon and Chilion died, and so--how plaintive are the words employed--" the woman was left of her two sons and her husband." They had gone on and left her behind. Had they done so of deliberate purpose it had been cruel indeed, but they heard a voice which they could not choose but obey, and so they passed through the silent portal, leaving Naomi, Orpah, and Ruth on the outside. But they left God with them, and they were not bereaved of him. Still, it was a sad home. Three widows and no child, and, as it would seem also, no resources. Sorrow, solitude, and penury. Widowhood, woe, and want--a sad trinity, needing no words of mine to set it in distinctness before you. What was now to become of them? As we follow the story we shall learn.

Meanwhile let us conclude by pointing out how this brief paragraph illustrates the changeful nature of our earthly life. Elimelech seems to have been what we should call "well off" in Bethlehem, but he went to Moab for comfort, and there found only a grave, beside which, within a few years, were those of his two sons. Alas, what a change for Naomi! And how often we see similar reverses in the families of those we know and love! How often, too, we observe that what men do for the improvement of their circumstances ends in disaster! Ah! but we must not say ends, and there is the comfort of it all. You observe that we are here only at the beginning of the history, and when we get to the end we shall be better able to appreciate the nature of this discipline. For it was all under the control of God, who wished thereby not only to educate those who were primarily concerned, but also through them to reach out into the Gentile nations, and bring back one who should not merely become a mother in Israel, but also part of the first-fruits of that Gentile harvest which the Messiah, in after-generations, was to reap. The very name of her husband might be a comfort to Naomi in all her distress, for when we can say "my God is King," or which comes to the same thing, "my times are in God's hands," we are sustained. The times may not be better, but we learn to look through them to the eternities, and to think that God is using the one for the surer gaining by us of the other, and that holds us up. It was a long look from the days of the Judges to those of Christ--at least, it would be a long look for us; but already God was preparing for the advent, and both Elimelech and Naomi were in a sense vicarious sufferers, in order that the world might be taught that the Messiah, coming as he did of a lineage in which are the names both of Rahab and of Ruth, was to be the Savior of Gentiles as well as Jews. But for these bereavements this had not been taught--at least, through Ruth; and so we Gentiles ought to look with peculiar tenderness on these Israelitish graves in the land of Moab. Those who were buried in them died that Ruth might be redeemed, and Ruth is here the representative of the entire Gentile world. It is a profound mystery. Yet it is a comforting truth.

02 Return and Reception (Ruth 1:6-22)

CHAPTER II RETURN AND RECEPTION

Ruth 1:6-22 The essence of home is in persons, not in locality. When, therefore, you have the presence and fellowship of those who are nearest and dearest to you, it is easy to be at home anywhere. But when the loved ones are gone, the fairest surroundings will not fill the void made by their absence. The heart then longs for that which strangers cannot give, and the old memories create a yearning for the old home of early days. It was natural, therefore, that Naomi, after the death of her husband and her sons, should be drawn again towards Bethlehem, so strongly that she determined to return thither. Forlorn, widowed, desolate, and destitute, she craved for that which Moab could not supply. A famine in the fields of Bethlehem took her to Moab; but now a famine in the heart made her hunger after Bethlehem; and having heard that "the Lord had visited his people in giving them bread," she arose to set out for her native place. But her daughters-in-law would not let her go alone. Apparently she did not request them to accompany her, but of their own accord they chose to make the journey with her. This was equally honorable to her and them. Her life with them had been one of harmony and love. They had grown into her affection, and she had become dear to them. In the delicate relationship which subsisted between them, she had so conducted herself towards them, with reticence, with wisdom, and with kindness; and they had so borne themselves towards her, with deference, with reverence, and with affection, that they could not think of parting with her. So they insisted upon going with her, and for a time she permitted them to be her companions. But it was above all things necessary, in her judgment, that she should be honest with them, and therefore she determined to put fully before them the real state of the case.

They knew little or nothing of the laws and customs of the Jews, and thought, perhaps, that it might be as easy for them to get on in Bethlehem as it had been for her to get on in Moab. It was only just, therefore, that she should set before them as delicately and as clearly as possible the privations which they would have to face. Possibly there was an ordinance in Moab similar to the Levirate law which existed among the Israelites, in accordance with which when a man died without leaving a son, his brother, or, if he had no brother, his nearest male kinsman was under obligation to marry the widow, and the first-born son of such a marriage was to be reckoned the son of the deceased, that his name and lineage might be preserved. Now Naomi gives her daughters-in-law to understand that there was no hope of their obtaining husbands in that way, and her statement implies, though it does not express, that, since that was impossible, there would be for them no possibility of marrying at all. In these modern times, when there are so many avenues open for a woman's working for her own support, though there is need even of more than are at present in existence, that would not be reckoned by many in Ruth's and Orpah's circumstances as a hardship. But in those early days it was quite different, for then, as Dr. Cassell tells us, "the position of a single woman was an unhappy one. It was altogether customary for youthful widows to marry again. Only a husband's house was the true asylum for a woman."(Lange, in loco)

Now Naomi informs her daughters-in-law that in Israel it would be impossible for them to get such a settlement. But she does it with the utmost tact and gentleness. First of all she bears unqualified testimony to their unfeigned kindness to their husbands and to herself, and that she may do it the more unreservedly and the more impressively, she turns it into a prayer, "Jehovah deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead, and with me." Then she entreats them to return, each to the house of her own mother until, if Jehovah pleased, each should find rest in the house of her husband. And when, after she had kissed them, they still refused to comply with her request, saying, "Nay, but we will return with thee unto thy people," she let them see how hopeless it was that they should be provided for through the Levirate law, and by her silence regarding any other plan, she said more expressively than she could have done by words, that there was no prospect of any such permanent home for them in Israel as either of them might easily find in Moab. All the while the tears fell fast from all their eyes, and most of all from hers who had seen the greatest sorrow, for she virtually says, It is far more bitter for me than for you, for the hand of the Lord hath gone out against me. Not, therefore, because she did not enjoy their fellowship, and did not desire their company, was she thus persistent. It was harder for her to part with them than it would be for them to part with her. If they went, never again would there be one beside her to call her mother, and she should go into the dreariest of solitude's, while they would be each in her mother's house, and might look forward to finding rest beneath a husband's roof. Hers would be the greater sacrifice if they went; but she could not be so selfish as to allow them, simply on her account, to bring upon themselves the privations that were inevitably before them. The effect of this representation was so great on Orpah that, with whatever reluctance, she said farewell, and went back to her kindred. But Ruth, true to the meaning of her name, would not be thus dismissed. She was determined not to be outdone in sacrifice even by Naomi, and therefore she clave unto her mother-in-law. But not yet had Naomi told all that would be required if she went with her to Bethlehem. There was one other subject that must be spoken about; and see with what adroitness of in directness she suggested it to her daughter-in-law. She said, "Behold, thy sister-in-law is gone back unto her people and her gods; return after thy sister-in-law." Thus she reminded Ruth that if she went with her she would be leaving her gods. It was criminal to worship Chemosh in Judah, and she must well consider whether she could take a step that involved the sacrifice of her religion. She had come to a crossing in her life, where she must part either with Naomi or with the idolatry of Moab, and she must not make such a decision blindly, inconsiderately, and without counting the cost. But it did not take Ruth long to determine even that. Not for nothing had she lived beside Naomi, during her happy days of wifehood. She had seen in the Hebrew matron much that she had never witnessed in the homes of Moab. There were a purity, a meekness, an affection, and a thoughtfulness for others about her, which made her feel that the religion which had brought out such qualities in her could not be bad; and so her confidence in and admiration of Naomi made her willing to venture herself with Naomi's Jehovah. It was not a very intelligent faith, indeed, but it was a real faith, like that which a child has in the Savior of whom his mother tells. He loves the Savior for his mother's sake, until at length he gets to love his mother for the Savior's sake. It was said of Thomas Arnold, the great English educator, that he first gained the boys' confidence in himself, and then on the strength of that led them to confidence in Christ. So here Naomi had, unconsciously, by the silent eloquence of her character, led Ruth to confide in her; and then at the critical moment Ruth, through that confidence, was brought to decide for Jehovah, without faltering and without reserve. Nay, so strong was her determination, and so fervent the

love out of which it sprung, that it expressed itself in words which no poetry has out-rivaled and no pathos has exceeded, and which have come down through the centuries with a music that will not let them be forgotten. "Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest! will go, and where thou lodgest I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: where thou diest will I die, and there will I be buried: Jehovah do so to me and more also, if aught but death part thee and me." What could be more unqualified than that? She will share her journey and her lodging, her home and her heritage, her experiences in life and her grave at death. Nor was this all; for not to be outdone by Naomi's delicacy, she will show that even already she was willing to forswear Chemosh, and therefore she takes an oath by Jehovah that nothing but death will ever part her from her fellowship. It was nobly promised, and it was as nobly performed; for the love that inspired the words was not like a thorn blaze which, bright for a moment, dies down into darkness, but rather like the glow of the sunshine, which lasts through all the day. There was no resisting an appeal of such a sort as that, and so Naomi, all the happier because Ruth, while fully understanding all that her decision involved, had not followed her advice, went with her gratefully and gladly forward towards her destination. When they arrived at Bethlehem the people of the city made a great stir, and said, "Is this Naomi?" They recognized her as their old neighbor; and yet they saw that she was greatly changed--so greatly that they could hardly believe that it was she after all. Then on Naomi's side, also, there must have been some misgivings about those who thronged around her. They saw the alterations in her, but they were all unconscious of those in themselves. Ten years make deep marks in those over whom they pass, especially if they have reached the midtime of their lives; and they who say, "How changed you are," to those who revisit home after a long absence, might well enough use the first personal pronoun and include themselves in the ejaculation. But the external alterations are of small account. The more important changes are those which are not seen all at once; and perhaps when we compare ourselves with what we were, in character and experience long ago, we might each see reason to exclaim, "Is this really myself!" You may remember that very striking poem of Miss Procter's in which she represents one in mature life looking at a portrait of herself that had been taken long years before, and moralizing over the contrast between then and now in a strain that concludes with these two lines:

"And I marvel to see the stranger Who is living in me to-day." And so I think each of us may do. So at least Naomi did. As her old neighbors called her by the old name in the old street, and said, "Is this Naomi?" She might have said, "Yes, I am changed, I know it; but the deepest change is one you do not see, for my heart is heavy. Call me no more Naomi (' sweet '), for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty: why call ye me Naomi, seeing the Lord hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me?"

It was very sad. But the saddest thing was that the Bethlehemites made no response to her sorrow. Had she come back with pomp and glory and riches they would have made much of her; for the world always fawns upon prosperity, and those who need least of its attentions get the most. But Naomi's account of her circumstances seems to have damped the ardor of the welcome given her by her old neighbors. None of them invited her home, or offered her hospitality. She was too poor now to be acknowledged in that way; and after the first expressions of surprise at her appearance, they let her severely alone. Nobody proffered her assistance. Some might even criticize and say, "She did not know when she was well. If she had only stayed among her own

kindred, she might have been as full as ever. But she would go. She made her own bed and she must lie on it now, hard as it is. And whatever possessed her to bring that young Moabitish woman with her, only to add to her burden, and make her perplexity the greater?" Ah, we know all about it. The rich have many friends; but they who come home empty from afar, come home full often to coldness and averted looks. Still Naomi with all her sadness had a brave, believing heart, and as she looked down upon the ripened barley falling before the reaper in the fields beneath, she would be reminded of Him who has put for His people the rainbow of His covenant into every cloud of trial.

Now, returning over this deeply pathetic narrative, we may learn to recognize God's hand in everything. It is noteworthy how constantly Naomi did that. Look over the verses that have to-night been before us, and you will be greatly struck with the frequency with which this feature of her piety presents itself. She had heard "that the Lord had visited his people in giving them bread." She said that "the hand of the Lord had gone out against her," and again, that "the Lord had testified against her, and the Almighty had afflicted her." It is not likely that she either undervalued or overlooked secondary causes, but she believed that God was in and over all these causes, working out His own purposes through their operation. And she recognized in all that came upon her the will of God concerning her. No doubt she was wrong in supposing that Jehovah was acting bitterly towards her, but in that she erred with Jacob when he cried, "All these things are against me." On the other hand, she was not wrong in believing that the Providence of God is in and over all events, and it were well for us if we realized that truth. How this universal providence can be maintained without interfering either with the uniformity of the workings of what men call the laws of nature, or with the free agency of man, it may be impossible for us to explain; but that it is maintained I take to be established both by the testimony of history in general, and of individual experience in particular. And if we believe the words of Jesus, when He says that the hairs of our heads are numbered, and that a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without our Father, we cannot hesitate to accept the doctrine, whatever mystery there may be about the mode of the divine operation.

Now, accepting that doctrine, we have in it an antidote both to pride in the time of prosperity, and to despondency in the season of adversity. For if prosperity comes, it comes from God; and if adversity befalls us, it has been sent from God; and since He is love, and has shown that love by the sacrifice of His Son upon the Cross, we may be sure that if we are His people in Christ, He cannot mean anything but love to us, whatever He may permit to come upon us. Naomi, therefore, was not wrong in tracing all her changes in condition to God, but she erred in ascribing any bitterness to God in His treatment of her. The father loves the child as really when he administers the disagreeable medicine which is to recover him from disease as when he is dandling him upon his knees. The only difference is in the manner in which the love is shown, and that is accounted for by the differences in the circumstances of the child. In like manner adversity, how bitter soever it may be, is a manifestation of God's love to us, designed for our ultimate and highest welfare. Now this may well reconcile us to trial. I say reconcile us to it. It will not make the trial less, but it will help us to bear it, just as the wounded man is braced for the amputation of a limb, when he is told that it is indispensable if his life is to be preserved. There is a "needs be" for every affliction, otherwise it would not come upon us under the providence of a God of love; and He sends it not in bitterness to us, but as the necessary means of "making perfect that which concerneth us."

Then if He send prosperity, we owe that to His favor rather than to our own ability; or if in any sense we owe it to our own ability, then that ability is itself His gift. So our faith in that view of the case will keep us from self-conceit. Thus the true believer in God's universal providence, if his faith in that doctrine be intelligent, is preserved alike from pride and haughtiness of heart in fulness, and from despair in emptiness. That doctrine is to the Christian's heart what a compensation balance is to a chronometer, and gives him equanimity in all conditions, so that he can sing:

"Father, I know that all my life is portioned out by Thee, And the changes that are sure to come I do not fear to see." And all his desire is so to possess his soul, that he may fall in with God's plan, and do always the things which please Him. Naomi did not all at once attain to that spirit, but she came to it at length, and we may accept the conclusion at which she ultimately arrived, as the premises from which we ought to reason. Why should we repeat either Jacob's unbelief or hers, when we see how kindly that was rebuked and condemned in both cases, by the result of that process the course of which so deeply distressed them? "Rest in the Lord, wait patiently for Him." Let Him finish His work in you before you presume to say that He is dealing bitterly with you or testifying against you, for this is one instance in which the otherwise most questionable doctrine is true, that "the end justifies the means," and when you get to the end, you will exclaim, "He hath done all things well." But as a second lesson from this simple story we may learn the duty of absolute frankness in our dealings with each other. Naomi could not think of taking her daughters-in-law with her without telling them what was before them. If she had not done this, and they had gone with her, then on their first experience of hardship they might have upbraided her for her selfishness and cruelty; so she put everything, delicately, indeed, yet fairly, before them. She told them the worst, so that if they went with her and had to endure that, they might never say that she had painted things all too rosily. If they were to be disappointed at all, she preferred that it should be in finding things better and not worse than she had indicated. Now, this is a matter of great importance, which is not, I fear, sufficiently considered by most people. When two parties are in negotiation, usually one of them is bent simply and only on success. He wishes, like an advocate, to gain his cause, and exaggerates all that tells for his side, keeping out of view altogether or depreciating everything against it; and the result, if he carries his point, is sure to be disappointment and estrangement. Some time ago certain parties in the old country were induced, through flattering, and, indeed, lying descriptions, to purchase some lands in Florida, and when they came out to take possession they found there nothing but bare and barren sand. Can you wonder that they exclaimed against the deceitfulness of Americans in general, and Florida land-agents in particular? But while we condemn such rascality as that, are we so sure that our own hands are clean? There is an old Roman maxim, *Caveat emitor*--"Let the buyer look after himself"--which has always seemed to me to have the rankest dishonesty beneath it, and which, I fear, is too often acted upon even among ourselves. Now, if we are going to sell anything, let us sell it for what it is, and not for what we know that it is not. If the buyer is mistaken, let us show him his mistake, even if we should at present lose money thereby; for if we do not, we shall not only do a dishonest act, but we shall lose him for a customer. It looks very "smart" to take advantage of the ignorance of him with whom you are dealing, but if you do, he will be "smart" enough never to give you the chance again, and if you go on in that way your business will very soon be at an end. The open, frank truthful policy, even as a policy, is always best; but it is more than a policy, it is a duty, and that cannot be evaded without sin. Nor is it only in business that we need to imitate Naomi's frankness with her daughters-in-law. We ought to act on the same principle, also, in the church. If

a congregation eagerly desires a certain man for a pastor, the members should set everything fairly before him, and he should be equally open and above-board with them. He ought not to impose on them with a few showy sermons, which he has elaborated for the captivating of the multitude, and they ought not to cover up everything that is difficult or disagreeable among them. Thus neither will be disappointed in the other. And, in general, if we see a friend bent upon a course of any sort under an entire misapprehension of what the consequence shall be, we ought, in justice to ourselves and in faithfulness to him, to put before him with all delicateness, yet with absolute truthfulness, that which he will have to face. Then if he will he will, but we, at least, have endeavored to secure that he should know what he is doing. In this connection who can forget the absolute honesty of the Lord Jesus Christ in His invitations to men to become His disciples? He promised them rest, indeed, but it was rest to their souls, and He never kept out of view the difficulties which they would have to encounter if they sought to act on His principles. Here are the terms of discipleship as laid down by Himself: "If any man be willing to come after Me, let him renounce self and take up his cross daily and follow Me ;" and, as you remember, he exhorted some who were more sentimental than serious to sit down and count the cost, lest, having put their hands to the plough, they should look back and so prove unworthy of Him. Now, that procedure of our Lord is valuable not only as teaching inquirers what they must expect if they become His disciples, but also as an example to us all to deal with absolute honesty and frankness with all with whom we have any negotiations, and sure I am that if we all did so there would be fewer criminations and recriminations between those who ought to dwell in harmony and love. It cost Naomi a good deal to say what she did to her daughters-in-law, but it would have cost her more if she had allowed Orpah to go forward blindfold to Bethlehem, for when the eye-opening came there would have been a painful rupture, followed, perhaps, by constant embitterment. But a third lesson from this narrative is the value of decision. Look at these words: "When she saw that she was steadfastly minded to go with her, she left off speaking unto her." Ruth's firmness put a stop to Naomi's entreaties. And it is the same always. When Paul would go up to Jerusalem, despite the tears of his friends, they ceased their importunity and said, "The will of the Lord be done." And if a man is seen to be decided in his stand for Christ, antagonists will give over assailing him. There is nothing in the use of which men are more discriminating than entreaty, argument, or influence. So long as the object of their solicitude is wavering they will bring all their batteries to bear upon him, for there is still the hope that he will yield. But when he comes openly and determinedly out for Christ they will waste no more ammunition on him. They leave him thenceforth alone, and attack some one else. Thus decision, while it may require an effort to make it, is, after it is made, a safeguard against assault. The attack is reserved for those who are yet undecided, but the decision silences all further importunity. So long as a vessel has no flag at her mast-head, the sea-robber may think it safe to attack her; but let her hoist the flag of this nation, and that will make the assailant pause. In like manner, the hoisting over us of the banner of the Cross, being a symbol of decision, is also an assurance of protection. Up with it then, my hearer, and keep it up; for while it shows that you have decided to be His, it places you also under His divine protection, and there you are secure. Take your stand--manfully, prayerfully, and determinedly; and when others see that you have done so they will let you alone.

Finally. This story shows us the difference between mere amiability and devotion. Orpah was a good, kindly-disposition woman, thoroughly amiable, very friendly to Naomi, but not willing to make the greatest sacrifice for her. When it came to the point where she had to choose between the

utter sacrifice of herself for Naomi and the return to her mother's house, then, amiable as she was, she went back to Moab. But Ruth's devotion was self-for-getting, and, at whatever sacrifice, she would go with Naomi to Bethlehem. Now, without pronouncing any condemnation on Orpah, I may take these two widowed sisters as types of two classes in their relation to Christ. On the one hand there are some who allege that they are not opposed to the gospel. On the whole they rather think well of it. They attend its ordinances. Up to a certain point they are its friends. But after a time they come to a fork in the road, where they must either part with Christ and His salvation or give up some heart-idolatry which they have long cherished; and there they halt. They are not willing to give that up even for Him. They have amiability, but not devotion-their center is self, not Christ. But there are others who will follow the Lord no matter at what cost or sacrifice; for it is the Lord they are thinking of and devoted to, not self. Now to which of these two classes do you belong? Are you unwilling to renounce self for Christ? Then let the words of Ruth determine you. Cleave fast to Christ. He is going to a glorious land--the home of joy and love. His lodging is a chamber whose window openeth towards the sunrising, the name of which is Peace. His people are a happy people; His God is a faithful God; His death is a victorious death; His burial is a hopeful burial, to be followed by a glorious resurrection. There is not another of whom these things can be said with truth--therefore cleave to Him through good report and through evil report, and He will give you an abundant entrance into His Father's house on high.

03 Gleaning (Ruth 2:1-17)

CHAPTER III

GLEANING

Ruth 2:1-17

Things were at the lowest ebb with Naomi. She had used no mere figure of speech when she said that the Lord had "brought her home empty," for she was literally destitute of the means of support. Something, therefore, had to be done at once to meet the emergency, and Ruth proved herself equal to the occasion. It was the beginning of barley harvest, and the sight of the reapers at work, with the gleaners following them, suggested to her what she would do. She, too, would become a Gleaner, for Naomi's sake. But she would do nothing without Naomi's sanction, and, therefore, she came to her with this request: "Let me now go to the field and glean ears of corn after him in whose sight I shall find grace." What thoughtful delicacy! what excellent wisdom! what energy of promptitude have we here! She did not wait until Naomi asked whether she could not help in some way to keep the wolf from the door, but, identifying herself thoroughly with her mother-in-law, and recognizing the necessity for exertion, she resolutely rose to the emergency and determined to do what she could for their common maintenance. Nor was she scrupulous as to the sort of industry in which she should engage. It might be true that she had been in comfortable circumstances, and had never needed to do any kind of out-door work while her husband lived; but she accepted the situation now, and was willing to do anything, however lowly, if only it were honest, for her own and her mother's livelihood. She did not dictate to Providence, or say that if she could get this or that she would take it, but she could never bring her self to do that other. Rather she was willing to take any honorable course that might open to her, and, as gleaning was the first that presented itself, she would take that, unless Naomi objected.

It is always hard for those who have been in comfort and are reduced to destitution to bring themselves to this willingness to take what offers, and perhaps it was easier for Ruth to act on such a determination in Bethlehem than it would have been in Moab, among those who had known her when she was better off. But in all cases, that is the surest way out of penury, and the sooner it is taken the shorter is the road. Naomi was well aware of that, we may be sure, and, therefore, with unexpressed admiration of the commonsense and what I may call the "pluck" of Ruth, and with silent gratitude to God for this manifestation of her self-sacrificing love, she put no obstacle in her way, but said to her heartily and with approval, "Go, my daughter." The field to which Ruth went, though apparently one large and undivided area, was really made up of the aggregate portions of land possessed by those who dwelt in Bethlehem. Just as, even at the present day, in some parts of Switzerland, the agricultural population live in villages round which their several patches of land lie--not cut up by hedges or fenced off by stone walls but forming what appears to be one immense field, though it is actually very carefully mapped out and divided by landmarks which are perfectly recognizable by the inhabitants themselves; so it was, long ago, in Bethlehem. To a casual visitor there would seem to be but one field, but yet the portion of each proprietor was

marked sometimes by heaps of small stones, and sometimes by single upright stones placed at short but regular intervals from each other. This enables us to understand the precept against the removal of a neighbor's landmark, and explains why in the narrative before us the word "field" is in the singular, and why it is said that Ruth found her place of privilege in the "part of the field which belonged to Boaz." In the law of Moses we find the following ordinances regarding gleaning: "When ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of thy field; neither shalt thou gather the gleanings of thy harvest; and thou shalt not glean thy vineyard, neither shalt thou gather every grape of thy vineyard; thou shalt leave them for the poor and stranger: I am the Lord your God." (Leviticus 19:9-10; Leviticus 23:22; Deuteronomy 24:19) Again, "When ye reap the harvest of your land thou shalt not make clean riddance of the corners of thy field when thou reapest; neither shalt thou gather any gleaning of thy harvest; thou shalt leave them unto the poor and to the stranger: I am the Lord your God!" And once more; "When thou cuttest down thine harvest in thy field, and hast forgot a sheaf in the field, thou shalt not go again to fetch it; it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow; that the Lord thy God may bless thee in .all the work of thine hands." There was no money tax levied in Israel for the relief of the poor, and so this provision was made for them. The landholders were never to remove everything from their fields, but were always to leave something for the stranger and the destitute. But while this series of laws required the proprietors of the soil to remember the poor, it did not give indiscriminate right to the destitute to go where they pleased and gather what they could find. That would have led to great abuses. The forward and obtrusive among those who were in want would then have carried off the lions share; while the timid and shrinking and sensitive ones would have been left out in the cold. And again, there might have been a run upon some particular fields to the almost entire neglect of others, and so there would have been unequal pressure upon the different proprietors. Therefore, while the right of the poor to glean was clearly secured, the exercise of that right by them was regulated by requiring that the Gleaner should obtain permission from the proprietor or his representative before beginning operations. So when she reached the field, Ruth, being attracted in the providence of God, either by the kindly countenance of the steward or by the appearance of the maidens who were working under his superintendence, to Boaz's section of the land, went and made request of "the man who was set over the reapers," saying, "I pray you let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves," and the favor so modestly asked was willingly granted. But how came Ruth to be able to make herself intelligible to this steward? The question is natural, for she was a Gentile and had only a few days before arrived in Bethlehem. But the answer has been furnished by the inscription on the Moabite Stone, which was discovered in 1868, and which has proved that there was little difference between the Moabitish and Hebrew languages. The distinguishing peculiarities in each were mainly dialectic-like the provincialism's prevailing in different parts of England; but beneath these there, was a common vernacular intelligible to both. Therefore we need not wonder that Ruth could converse so fluently and intelligently with the people of Bethlehem. But it is now nearing noonday, and yonder is the proprietor himself, coming to look after his servants. Let us attentively regard him, for he is well worthy of our notice, not only because he will become a principal actor in our little drama, but also because he is a worthy specimen of the people to whom he belongs and of the class which he represents. He is described in the first verse of our chapter as "a mighty man of wealth," but it is questionable if that expression fairly represents the original. The phrase is identical with that which is elsewhere rendered "a mighty man of valor," and only in one other place is it translated as here,

"a mighty man of wealth." Some, therefore, have supposed that he was a great warrior, and others have leaned to the idea that he was merely a man of wealth. But in these early days, especially under the rule of the Judges, when hostile inroads on the chosen people were so frequently made by unfriendly neighbors, the man who had great possessions was in a manner compelled to be also a military leader; and so we may very justly combine the two meanings, and speak of him as a valiant man and a wealthy; or, as Dr. J. Morison has paraphrased the expression, "a strong and substantial yeoman." His name was Boaz, which signifies either strength or agility; or, according to some others, prosperousness, and he was, as the chapter tells us, a kinsman of Elimelech, belonging, indeed, to the same "family." The word translated kinsman here means primarily "an acquaintance," but as the closest acquaintances are ordinarily kinsfolk, it came to signify a relation. What the degree of relationship between Boaz and Elimelech was we are not distinctly informed. We shall find before the close of the story that he was not the nearest of kin, but that he was a near kinsman, and the rabbis--without, however, giving an atom of evidence in support of their assertion--have affirmed that he was Elimelech's nephew, and therefore the first cousin of Ruth's husband. Note, in passing, the minute providence which led Ruth to the part of the field which belonged to this man. She knew nothing of his relationship to her husband; it had even escaped the recollection of Naomi, until she had it brought back to her memory in the evening by Ruth's report of the day's proceedings. But, all unconsciously to herself, she was drawn to the very place out of which her help was to come. The record says, "Her hap was to light upon" the Boaz part of the field, or, as it might be more literally rendered, "Her hap happened," "her lot met her." But the historian would not have us to believe that it was all by chance. On the contrary, the great lesson of the book is that "the Lord is mindful of His own," and that He leads them through ways that they know not, to the end which He has designed for them. But the writer speaks here after the manner of men. He describes all that men see. They cannot trace the workings of the divine hand; they perceive only what takes place before their eyes; and so he says here of Ruth that "her hap happened," "her lot met her," "her hap was to light" on the part of the field belonging to Boaz, but he means every reader to infer that God had turned her steps thither. But listen, as Boaz comes along to join his band, he cries to them, "The LORD be with you." Mark the courtesy of this great man. He is not above speaking kindly to his workmen. He does not hold himself stiffly aloof from them. He does not order them about with haughty indifference, as if he were speaking to an inferior order of beings. No, no; they, too, belong to the chosen people. All alike are children of Abraham. All alike are included in the covenant. They are all members of the same spiritual household, and so he treats them with respectful kindness.

Mark, again, his piety. He cries, "The LORD be with you." Now, I know that this has become the common salutation in the East, for Dr. Thomson tells us that "The Lord be with you" is merely the "Allah m'akum" of ordinary custom. I am well aware, also, that by frequent use, even such expressions of piety come to be employed without any pious feeling, and often even by those who have no faith in God at all. How seldom do we think of God when we say "good-bye," which is simply "God be with you!" It is possible that even infidels and atheists may take leave of each other with that word, and without any consciousness of inconsistency in so making use of it. So it is possible that Boaz simply meant to be courteous when he used this salutation, and that there was no more piety in it than there is in a modern "goodbye." It is possible, but not very probable, for, as we shall see in the future, this man was in the habit of tracing all blessings to God, and of commending those whom he loved to the care of God, and therefore in his mouth the ordinary

salutation was restored from its common colorlessness to its first uncommon piety, and meant everything which it had originally expressed. But this salutation was no mere one-sided thing. The reapers answered, "The LORD bless thee." They did not look askance upon their employer, as if he had been their natural enemy. They recognized that in his prosperity they would prosper, and that in his adversity they could not but be sufferers with him; and therefore they reciprocated his courtesy, and followed his prayer for them by their prayers for him. It is a beautiful sight. One feels almost as if he were transported three thousand years back to Bethlehem, and saw it all before his eyes. The portly proprietor coming with stately dignity along to his own plot of the field, and kindly saluting the laborers in Jehovah's name; the reapers lifting themselves up simultaneously from their constrained position, each with the sweat on his face and the sickle in his hand, returning the salutation with hearty affection: "An intercourse this," as William Arnot says, "between rich and poor, between master and servant, which we love to think of in those patriarchal times, which we weep the want of in our own." (The Race for Riches, and some of the Pits into which the Runners fall. By William Arnot, pp. 1, 2. Edinburgh, 1852) As Boaz glances over the band, he sees a stranger among the gleaners. But though he is struck with her appearance, and interested to inquire concerning her--for in a small community like that of Bethlehem the appearance of a new-comer would always awaken curiosity--yet he does not make immediate inquiry concerning her. With a delicateness which seems to have been more common in those times than it is in some circles among ourselves, he waited until Ruth had gone for rest into the hut which had been erected for the shelter of the work-people from the sun, and then in her absence he said to his steward, "What damsel is this?" In response the man told Ruth's story, either as he had himself become acquainted with it from common report, or as it had come out in his conversation with her in the morning, and said, "It is the Moabitish damsel that came back with Naomi out of the country of Moab, and she said, I pray you, let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves; so she came and hath continued even from the morning until now that she tarried a little in the house." On receiving this information Boaz, probably from his kinship to Naomi, perhaps, also, from a deeper and more subtle cause, became interested in Ruth. Calling her to him by the kindly name of daughter, which indicated at once his age and her youth, and his tender regard for her, he requested her to do all her gleaning on his land, and to keep fast by his maidens, who would give to her the companionship and protection that always come to a woman from the presence with her of those of her own sex. He told her that he had ordered the young men to treat her with civility and respect, and not to subject her to the rough horse-play which was so common on the harvest-field, and he gave her the right to quench her thirst at the vessels which the young men had drawn--perhaps from the well for the water of which David so longed at a later day--for the benefit of all the laborers. This considerate treatment at the hand of a stranger went straight to the heart of Ruth, who fell at the feet of her benefactor, saying, "Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldest take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger?" But in response he gave her to understand that her whole recent history was familiar to him; and the manner in which he dwells upon its details seems to reveal that he had been deeply impressed with them. Indeed, as he enumerates them it appears as if he was gathering intensity as he proceeded, until he could find no relief for his feelings save in the prayer, so simple, so beautiful, so comprehensive, so appropriate, "The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust." There is no conventionality about that. Such a supplication could come only from a pious heart, as well as from a kindly disposition, and Ruth

was equally sincere when she said, "Thou hast comforted me, and thou hast spoken to the heart of thine handmaid, though I be not like unto one of thine handmaidens." "Alas! no," as if she had added, "but only a widow and a stranger." But now the hour for refreshment has come, and Boaz invites her to partake of the food which had been prepared for his laborers. This consisted of "parched corn," which, according to Dr. Thomson, was prepared thus: "A quantity of the best ears, not too ripe, are plucked with the stalks attached. These are tied in small parcels, a blazing fire is kindled with dry grass and thorn-bushes, and the corn heads are held in it until the chaff is mostly burned off. When the grain is sufficiently roasted it is rubbed out in the hand and eaten as there is occasion." (The Land and the Book, English edition, p. 648. Biblical Researches, vol. ii., p. 50.) But Dr. Robinson describes another method. He says: "In the season of harvest the grains of wheat not yet fully dry and hard are roasted in a pan or on an iron plate, and constitute a very palatable article of food, which is eaten with bread or instead of it." Of this Ruth ate and was sufficed, and left, or rather "had something over," which, as we shall see, she carried home in the evening to Naomi. Besides this, she "dipped her morsel in the vinegar," which was a mixture of vinegar and water with a little oil, into which each reaper dipped his bread before eating. It was genuine open-air hospitality--a picnic, with the added zest of labor to give it flavor, and the joy of harvest to give it gladness. I have seen and shared in similar feasts many a time in the harvest fields of the west of Scotland, and there is a spontaneity in all such mirthfulness that contrasts most suggestively with the manufactured cheerfulness of a mere "garden-party." When the simple meal was over, Boaz lingered behind to tell his young men to let Ruth glean, if she would, even among the sheaves, without reproach, and to bid them let fall purposely a few handfuls, that she might, without any loss of self-respect or without any feeling of undue dependence, obtain all the more from her work. Here, again, we mark the delicateness to which we have already so frequently referred. Many men spoil a kindness by the clumsy way in which they do it; but Boaz secured here that a good service should be rendered to Ruth, even when most she felt that she was helping herself. He contrived that her gleanings should be increased, while yet she did not know that they were not all the product of her own industry. So when the even was come, and she beat out with a stick the grain from the ears which she had gathered, she found that she had taken home to Naomi nearly a bushel of barley. But now, leaving for another discourse the report which Ruth gave to Naomi of her day's experiences when she went home in the evening, let us take with us some practical lessons for our modern life from this deeply interesting story.

See, then, in the first place, how a change of circumstances reveals character. What an unveiling of Ruth's real nature her poverty made! Had she been always prosperous we had never thoroughly known her, and Naomi might never have discovered the nobleness that was in her. The purity of the diamond was made manifest by the cutting to which it was subjected. It is not always thus, however. Sometimes reverse of fortune brings out hardness, cynicism, almost misanthropy; and those who seemed in prosperity to be no worse than the average of their neighbors, develop under adversity into miserable, discontented, suspicious, and uncharitable people who have not a good word to say of anybody, and are at war with themselves, with their neighbors, and with God himself. But that is only because from the first they have been wrong. When they had their prosperity they did not thank God for it, but traced it to that in themselves which enabled them to rise in spite of those around them; but now in their adversity, strangely enough, they cast the blame on others and on God, and they are so bitter in their feelings that they cannot bring themselves to do even that which offers for their own support. Alas for such! they put it almost out

of the power of others to assist them, and, wrapped in their own stolid defiance, they are like the man in the river who cried out, "I will be drowned, and nobody shall help me." I know few more pitiable objects than those whose misfortunes have thus petrified them, and I pray God to keep us all from such a spirit as they manifest. But the finer the nature is originally, the more nobly does it come out when the individual is required to "take a lower room" at the world's banquet. Beautifully has it been said here by a young English preacher, whose early death was a deep sorrow to all who knew him: "The widow who, when bereavement has changed all her fortunes, goes forth to earn her children's bread with her own hands; the daughter who, once accustomed to all that wealth could purchase and the doubtful privilege of unbroken ease, turns her accomplishments into a means of support for her aged father; these, and such as these, reveal in new circumstances new graces--graces that are sturdy virtues, that shine with an unborrowed splendor, and are beautiful in the sight of Heaven. There has been no humiliation in all this; the brave toilers have made the worst drudgery sublime, and they have risen to a grander dignity than all the world's worth could confer. Their friends and neighbors may have considered it misfortune, and may call it the Valley of Humiliation; yet though, like Christian, they have met an Aponyon there, they, too, have seen visions of angels, and lifted their voices in happy song. Ah! there are compensations even in this world of which we little dream, and God sets one thing, and often a better thing, over against another in human life. Riches fly, but character is developed; we are compelled to work, and out of work spring our truest joys. Our life is paradoxical but without contradictions; we are made the least that we may become the greatest; and the way down is, with God as guide, always the road to exaltation." (The Beautiful Gleaner. By Rev. William Braden, pp. 52, 53) But although the change in Ruth's circumstances here was from comfort to penury, I cannot help adding that there is a similar revealing power, so far as character is concerned, in a sudden rise from poverty to affluence. Sometimes that, as in the case of Hazael, has shown a hard, ambitious cruelty in a man, in whom the existence of such a disposition was never even suspected. The getting has developed selfishness rather than liberality, and the possession of power has given opportunity for its arbitrary exercise. Then again, in others it has seemed to sweeten them, and to bring out kindness. It all depends on the character of the person to begin with, and that again depends on the relationship between him and God in Christ. So, if we would be prepared for anything that God's providence may bring us; if we would not be injured in that which is our truest self, either by sudden prosperity or by unexpected misfortune, we need to look well to our piety; we need to cultivate close and intimate fellowship with God; we need to have the equalizing influence within us of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit; we need, in one expressive phrase, to have the soul ballasted with Christ, and then no sudden squall or change of wind, whether from affluence to poverty or from poverty to affluence, will endanger or submerge us. Either prosperity or adversity will capsize us without Him, but with Him in the boat beside us we are always safe. But now in the second place let us see in the fellowship between Boaz and his reapers, a fingerpost pointing to the true solution of all difficulties between employers and employed. We have heard and read a great deal on that subject in these recent days. Indeed, little else has been discussed among us of late, either in the newspapers or in private conversation or in public discourse. For the present, indeed, we have reason to congratulate ourselves that the premature explosion of that bomb in Chicago (This discourse was delivered not long after the riot in Chicago, for which the Anarchists were tried) has opened the eyes of the community to the danger that is involved to our property and civilization from the occurrence of such troubles, and

unified the sentiment of the nation as to the manner in which that kind of warfare is to be dealt with. But the real question lies back behind the violence to which all strikes seem to be near of kin; and the anarchism which in all our large cities is so ready to take advantage, for its own infamous purposes, of any disorder that may arise and for which the working-men, as a class, are not to be held responsible. The real question is this: How may the state of feeling between employers and employed, which is so apt to break out into open antagonism, be removed and permanently made impossible? Why is it that every little difference between them as to wages or hours of labor leads on to strikes and bitter estrangement? How comes it that the labor atmosphere is so explosive and electric? And what shall be done in the way of remedy? Now when--apart from recent provoking manifestations, which, for the time being, have tended to prejudice many against the working-men--we look at this problem, we shall find that there have been faults on both sides. If they have not been as courteous to their employers as his reapers were to Boaz, neither have their employers always been as courteous to them as Boaz was to his reapers. And if the employed have been utterly neglectful of the principles of political economy, their employers have not always remembered that political economy, though it be a real science, is not mechanics, and has to do not with machines, but men. It is true, indeed, that in recent strikes the cause of alienation has been the employment of men who for some reason--not touching either their character or efficiency have been distasteful to the majority of the workmen; and it is astonishing that men of intelligence do not see that interference of that sort is a flagrant infringement upon the liberty of other workmen to earn their bread as they can. It is surprising, too, that they do not realize that when they strike they terminate the contract between them and their employers, and so put themselves out of court altogether, and forfeit all right even to arbitration. Then as to the question of hours. It is not to be denied that the demand of ten hours' wages for eight hours' work is one which, in its blindness, either does not or will not perceive that it is as impossible to get that really in the long-run as it is to get five out of twice two. For even if the demand be acceded to, then, when things have adjusted themselves to the new state of matters thereby created, as they infallibly will do in a very short time, it will be found that they have simply added one-fifth to the price of everything which they have to buy, and that is the same as saying that the purchasing power of their wages--nominally the same in dollars and cents--will then be reduced by one-fifth. Really, that is substantially what they are bringing upon themselves--nay, what they are eagerly seeking, with all the added expense and danger of their strikes. Much, therefore, might be accomplished by spreading a little more widely among them the knowledge of these principles, which are as simple as the alphabet, but as inexorable as the law of gravitation. But still the question arises, How shall we heal the state of feeling out of which this habit of looking upon each other as natural enemies has grown up between employers and employed? Now, in answer, some have suggested arbitration; some have exhorted the working-men to make up for the want of capital in the hands of one by co-operation among themselves, so that they may become themselves competitors of the employers; and some have proposed that, by means like those suggested by Professor Ely, of Baltimore, the employed should be given a share of the profits of the employers, though that would be one-sided if they were not also called upon to make up a share of the losses --but, so far as I have seen, few have spoken about that. Now, of course, a great deal can be said in favor of such schemes as these; but for the present they all seem to me alike impracticable, because they all require for their successful operation a disposition towards each other which is radically different from that which has existed for a considerable time between

them. If we had that changed, the problem would be more manageable. I am not sure, indeed, but that the simple changing of that would remove the problem altogether. But how are we to change that? How shall we remove all bitterness out of the hearts of employers towards their employed, and how shall we remove out of the hearts of the employed all envy of their employers? To that I have but one answer. The Lord Jesus Christ broke down the middle wall between Jews and Gentiles, and only He can reconcile--not superficially, but really and through and through--employers and employed. Boaz and his reapers belonged to the same commonwealth of Israel, and were heirs of the same covenant of promise. They were children of the same household of faith, and so they regarded each other as brethren. That was what kept this greeting from degenerating into a mere formality. That was what produced their mutual kindness for each other. And in the same way, when employers and employed shall recognize their common brotherhood to Christ, and feel that in dealing with each other they are dealing with Christ, then and then only shall we get rid of that mutual suspicion of each other which is the soil wherein all these roots of bitterness spring up. I hear, therefore, in these labor troubles a new and louder call to the churches of our land to prosecute with vigor the work of home evangelization, not only among the working-people, but also among their employers. I emphasize that last clause, "but also among their employers," for they need it just as much as their workmen. It is common, I fear, to think that evangelization is required only for the masses of the employed, but that is a delusion. There are proportionately as many unbelievers in the gospel among the capitalists as there are among the laborers. I fear that, in proportion to the numbers of both, there are more, and, as a rule, employers are far too indifferent to the gospel. They are not sufficiently under its power, and perhaps the inkling of what atheistic socialism would do if it could, which these last weeks have given, may help to quicken them to a sense of the importance of their identifying themselves more thoroughly with Christ. But only in the meeting of both in Christ will the solvent -of this problem be found, and we must seek so to deal with both as to bring that about. For when that is reached there will be courtesy and kindness in their intercourse. They will not be afraid of each other, neither will they be suspicious of each other, but they will love as brethren, and selfishness will cease to be the main-spring of their conduct. This has been demonstrated very clearly in the case of individual establishments. I have not heard of any strikes or bitterness at St. Johns-bury, Vermont, where masters and men are office-bearers in the same church, and brethren at the same communion-table. And that is by no means a solitary instance. Conversing not long ago with the president of a railway who had just been bereaved of his wife, I learned from him that some of the most touching letters which he had received at the time of his trial came from surface-men on the line. Wherever he had gone he had sought to show himself friendly to his men, and so they could not help expressing sympathy with him. Nothing approaching to any feeling of suspiciousness had ever come between them, and he has no fear of a strike among them. Give us this common Christianity between them, and we may trust that, either to prevent any differences or to settle them peacefully when they do arise. Nothing else will do it. But if you have that, any feasible plan will be workable. "He is our peace." Oh, when shall the different classes among us find out that? Come forth out of Thy royal chamber, O Thou living Christ! In the triumph of Thy love bring employer and employed together to Thy feet, that they may choose Thee for the great arbitrator between them, and Thy decisions, being founded in love as well as justice, shall be willingly accepted by them both.

I had intended to add a word on the beautiful prayer of Boaz for Ruth--" The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou hast come to trust "--but I must forbear. Let me only commend to you all the protection of these outspread wings. You must go to trust somewhere. You are now trusting in something. Whither have you gone? In what are you trusting? No wings but God's can cover you in the time of trial and in the day of judgment. Therefore, get beneath them now. This is your opportunity. Get beneath them now, lest a day should come when He shall say, "How often would I have gathered thee as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not? Behold, now, your house is left unto you desolate."

04 The Threshing Floor (Ruth 2:18-Ruth 3:18)

CHAPTER IV THE THRESHING-FLOOR Ruth 2:18-23; Ruth 3:1-18

Naomi had probably an anxious day of it, as she sat at home, wondering how her daughter-in-law was faring among strangers in the harvest-field. But when she saw Ruth return at even-tide with an epha of barley in her mantle and a look of satisfaction on her face, she did not need to ask how she had got on, for she knew at once that "the lines had fallen unto her in pleasant places." We can easily imagine with what pride the daughter laid her burden down at the mother's feet, and with what delight she brought forth the surplus of the parched corn which Boaz had given her at noon, and which she had so thoughtfully reserved as a treat for the solitary one whom she had left at home. We can easily, also, fill in the outline which the sacred writer has given us of the mother's joy as, looking at the result of her daughter's exertions, she broke out into ejaculations of pleased surprise, and ran on into a series of questions without waiting for an answer to any one of them; finding at length the fitting climax to her feelings in a benediction of her benefactor. It was as if she had said: "Well done, my daughter! Who could have expected anything like this? Where did you get all that barley? And the parched corn, too---how good it is! Surely, they must have been particularly kind to you. Whose part of the-field were you in? who did you glean with? He must have taken special notice of you, and, whoever he was, may a blessing rest on him for his goodness. It may have been a little thing to him, but it has been a great deal to you and to me."

Then, when Ruth had rested a little, and Naomi's effusiveness gave her an opportunity to speak, she told that the man on whose part of the field she had gleaned was Boaz. In a moment it flashed upon Naomi's memory that Boaz was a kinsman of Elimelech --was, in fact, one of the Goelims, or redeemers, on whom it might devolve, according to the law of Moses, to buy the land which had belonged to her deceased husband, and which, under the pressure of circumstances, she would now have to sell in order to get the means of support. This being the case, Naomi thought she saw the motive of Boaz in showing such kindness to Ruth, and so the benediction, which had before been general and impersonal, is repeated by her with definite reference to him, for she says: "Blessed of Jehovah be he, who hath not left off his kindness to the living and to the dead ;" that is, who hath shown his generosity to the living, and through that hath made manifest his continued respect for the memory of the dead. She recognized the providence which had conducted Ruth to his part of the field; and hearing of his treatment of Ruth, and of his request that she should keep fast by his young men until the close of his harvest, she probably discerned in this the beginning of the end of all their troubles, though it is hardly likely that as yet she had any definite conception of the precise manner in which they were to be terminated. But whatever were her motives, she heartily urged Ruth to accept the invitation of Boaz, and thus it came about that all through the time of harvest, which lasted for at least two or three weeks, Ruth kept close by the maidens of Boaz to glean by day, and returned at evening to the abode of Naomi, to cheer her by her nightly reports of the day's doings, given by the one in the open frankness of affection, and commented on by the other with the wisdom of experience. But when the harvest was finished, the old question of "What shall we do now?" had to be confronted; and this time Naomi took the initiative,

for now she thought she saw the prospect of a life settlement for Ruth. It is beautiful to mark the unselfishness of each of these women, or rather their unselfish consideration of each by the other. As Cassell has said: "While the women are in distress it is Ruth that takes the initiative; now when hope grows large it is Naomi. When hardship was to be endured, the mother submitted her will to the daughter, for Ruth was not sent to glean but went of her own accord; now, when the endeavor is to secure the joy and happiness held out in prospect, the daughter yields in all things to the direction of the mother. The thought of labor for the mother originates with the daughter, but it is the mother who forms plans for the happiness of the daughter." (Lange, in laea.) Naomi had set her heart on finding rest for Ruth in the house of a husband, and that husband no other than Boaz. With this object in view, she unfolds a plan which she desires Ruth to follow in every particular. In the simple narrative it is given thus: "And now is not Boaz of our kindred, with whose maidens thou wast? Behold, he winnoweth barley to-night in the threshing-floor. Wash thyself therefore, and anoint thee, and put thy raiment upon thee, and get thee down to the floor: but make not thyself known unto the man, until he shall have done eating and drinking. And it shall be, when he lieth down, that thou shalt mark the place where he shall tie, and thou shalt go in, and uncover his feet, and lay thee down, and he will tell thee what thou shalt do."

Now all this, it must be confessed, seems to us, with our modern ideas, not only exceedingly improper, but also terribly hazardous. It must be admitted, too, that, judged even by the conventionality of those almost patriarchal times, it was unusual, and, as the words of Boaz himself make evident, would have been compromising to the reputation of both if it had been known. But in order to a right estimate of its nature we must take in all that can be said upon the other side.

We must remember, in the first place, that the proposal was made by Naomi, whose whole character, as it comes out in this book, was marked by devout reverence towards God and purity towards man, and to whom the honor of Ruth was as dear as her own. We cannot, therefore, believe that she would willfully do that which would endanger her reputation. That would have been but a poor return for all the self-sacrifice that Ruth had manifested on her behalf.

Again, we must take it for granted that she knew the sort of man Boaz was. Probably in the years gone by he had been the companion and friend of her husband, and she had then had means of judging of his character. Then, since her return she had been watching him, and perhaps she felt that she could trust Ruth in his hands. Furthermore, we must believe that there had been lying behind all this an interesting history which is here unwritten, and which had come out during these harvest weeks in the evening talks of Ruth after her return from the field, and, perhaps, also, in the visits of Boaz, on occasions, at her humble home. She had been taking notes very diligently all the time, and it may be that the pensive absent-mindedness of her daughter, now that the gleaning season was over, had revealed to her that she was something else than indifferent to her benefactor; while, perhaps, there were indications also on the part of Boaz that his interest in Ruth was more tender than that of mere kindness and compassion. But more than all, we must give full weight to the fact that Boaz was one of Elimelech's Goelims, and to the claim which law and custom gave to her on him in that capacity. There were three duties which devolved upon the Goel, or kinsman redeemer. These may be succinctly described as follows: When an Israelite, through poverty, sold his inheritance and was unable to redeem it, it devolved upon his Goel to purchase it. Again, when an Israelite had wronged any one and sought to make restitution, but found that the

party whom he had wronged was dead without leaving a son, it fell to the next of kin of the injured party to represent him and receive the reparation. Finally, when a man was foully murdered, it fell to the Goel or next of kin, subject to the provisions laid down in connection with the Cities of Refuge, to execute justice on the murderer, and hence he was called the Avenger of Blood. But along with these duties devolved on the Goel by law, others seemed to have been required of him by custom; for, when there was no one else to do it, he came to be looked to for the carrying out of the provisions of what is called the Levirate law. That statute enjoined that when a man died without leaving children, his brother should marry the widow, and the first-born of that marriage should be accounted the child of the deceased. But when there was no brother-in-law, custom looked to the Goel to take his place. The law did not absolutely require it, but public opinion did--though it did not put the repudiation of the widow's claim by the Goel upon the same plane of dishonor as it did that of the brother-in-law. If the brother-in-law refused to marry his sister-in-law, he was subjected to insult at her hands by her plucking off his shoe and spitting in his face in the gate of the city--acts which were equivalent among us Western people to the knocking of a man's hat over his eyes on the Exchange--and the subjecting of him, besides, to the vilest indignity. In the case of a kinsman not so near as the brother, there was indeed no specific statute on the subject, but custom had sanctioned a kind of amalgamation of the law relating to the Levirate marriage, with that concerning the Goel, or redeemer; so that, as Alexander has said, "The Goel had a right to purchase the land, but in so doing came under an obligation from custom to marry the widow of the deceased owner; and the brother-in-law (Levir) was bound to marry the widow of his deceased brother, which involved, as a matter of course, the redemption of his property if he had sold it." (Lange, in laea.)

Now, if I have succeeded in making the matter plain to you, it will be apparent that Boaz, as a Goel of Elimelech, had a right by law to redeem his property, and that, according to the custom, the exercise of that right involved on his part, also, the marriage of Naomi. But Naomi transferred her claim to Ruth, and the question she had to solve was how to bring that before the notice of Boaz. It was not his part in such a case to offer. He had to wait until he was requested to act; and this plan was formed by Naomi for the purpose of bringing him to prompt and decisive action in the case. But when all is said that can be said on her behalf, I fully appreciate and indorse the words of Kitto, when he thus writes, "We still think, however, that the occasion for making this demand was unusual, and, to a certain degree, indiscreet. This may be gathered from the anxiety which Boaz himself eventually expressed, while doing the utmost honor to her character and motives, that it should not be known that a woman had been there. He must have feared that evil tongues might misconstrue, to his and her discredit, a proceeding far from evil when rightly understood. It is not unlikely that when this matter had been first suggested by Naomi, Ruth, as a stranger, had shrunk from making this claim publicly in the harvest-field, and that Naomi had, therefore, to spare her in that respect, devised this mode of enabling her to do so in private, in which she would find less difficulty, seeing that Boaz had already won her confidence by his fatherly consideration for her. It may be that desire to evade one difficulty somewhat blinded this good woman to the danger that may have lurked in the other alternative." (Daily Bible Illustrations, vol. iii., p. 40) Keeping, then, these considerations in mind, we may without any difficulty thread our way through the rest of the story. The threshing-floor in those times, as, indeed, still in the East, was in the immediate neighborhood of the harvest-field. It was a level area, the ground of which was trodden into hardness, and the grain was threshed, either by the dragging over it of a heavy slab called

mowref, or by the trampling of cattle. Then the winnowing was accomplished by throwing up the grain with a fork against the wind; and that operation was frequently performed at night to get the benefit of the evening breeze. At such times, also, it was usual either for the owner of the field or some of his men to sleep on the floor, in order that he might be ready to give the alarm if any robbers should come to steal from him the product of his industry. Thus Dr. Edward Robinson, speaking of Hebron, says, "Here we needed no guard around our tent. The mowers of the crops came every night and slept upon their threshing-floors to guard them, and this we had found to be universal in all the region of Gaza. We were in the midst of scenes precisely like those of the Book of Ruth, when Boaz winnowed barley in his threshing-floor, and laid himself down at night to guard the heap of corn." (Biblical Researches, vol. ii., p. 446) And Dr. Thomson tells us that he has "on various occasions seen the mowers sleeping on the summer threshing-floors to prevent stealing, just as the wealthy Boaz did when Ruth came to him." He adds that "though it is not customary for women to sleep at those floors, and to do so would produce the same unfavorable impression which Boaz apprehended, yet it is not unusual for husband, wife, and all the family to encamp at the threshing-floor and remain until the harvest is over." (The Land and the Book, as before, pp. 648, 649).

These particulars will enable us to realize the whole circumstances, as Ruth followed implicitly the instructions of her mother-in-law. Watching until Boaz was fast asleep, she went and lay down at his feet. But when he became aware of her presence he started up, and said, "Who art thou?" Whereupon she answered, "I am Ruth thine handmaid: spread thy skirt," or rather spread thy wings --for there is no reference to the cover which she had taken from his feet but rather she uses the figure of the bird which Boaz had already employed in speaking to her of Jehovah--spread thy wings over thine handmaid for thou art a Goel, or kinsman redeemer. "Take me under thy protection as thy wife." That was the formal claim of her words, and Boaz at once understood them in that sense, for he said, "Blessed be thou of Jehovah my daughter: for thou hast showed more kindness in the latter end than at the beginning, inasmuch as thou followedst not young men whether poor or rich." That is to say, "This act of thine is a greater kindness to Naomi than was even thy leaving of Moab for her sake; for thou hast deliberately preferred to stand in Naomi's place, and to claim from the Goel thy right at his hands, in order that 'the name of the dead be not cut off from among his brethren, and from the gate of his place,' and because thou hast thus merged thyself in the house and lineage of Elimelech, blessed be thou of Jehovah." Then he pledged himself to do all that she required, because all the gate of his people knew that she was a worthy woman. But there was still one obstacle in the way, for though he was a Goel he was not the Goel. There was a kinsman nearer to Elimelech than he, and nothing could be done by Boaz until that relative had repudiated. He promised, therefore, that in the morning he would bring the matter before that other, and if he would perform the kinsman's part, well and good, let him do it; but if he would not, then Boaz would take his place, and this assurance he confirmed with an oath, "as Jehovah liveth." Then in the morning, before one could discern another, he sent her away to Naomi, and that her mother might have the assurance of his goodwill, even although her plan had not gone altogether as she had expected, he sent with her six measures of barley, which he scooped into her mantle. On her return, Naomi met her with the singular yet suggestive question, "Who art thou, my daughter?" as if she had said, Art thou still the widow of Mahlon, (See Ruth 4:10.) or art thou now the betrothed of Boaz? and in answer Ruth told her all she had to tell, which, when Naomi heard, she knew how to interpret, for she said, "Sit still my daughter until thou know

how the matter will fall: for the man will not rest until he have finished the thing this day." How true this forecast was, and what came out of the intervention of Boaz, we shall see in our next discourse; meanwhile let us ourselves become gleaners, and gather up a few suggestive lessons from this fruitful field.

And, in the first place, let me draw your attention to the general wholesomeness and helpfulness of evening confidences among the members of the same household when the labors of the day are done. Few things in this most interesting story are more beautiful than the frank and simple talks between Naomi and Ruth, in the confidence of domestic abandon, before they retired for the night. The daughter then made the mother sharer in all her experiences throughout the day, and the mother followed up the communication with practical suggestions for the morrow. One needs not to approve in every particular the counsels which Naomi gave, before he can see the value of such a household custom; and if I may speak alike from observation and experience, I would say that the happiest hours of home life are those in which parents and grown-up children sit together in winter by the cheerful fire, and in summer in the cool, dim twilight, and tell each other where they have gleaned, and with whom, and with what success they have labored throughout the day. Nor is the happiness of such fellowship all the good that there is in it. It unifies the household, giving to all a deep and living interest in the labors and success of each, and so helping to counteract that tendency to utter individualism which is one of the greatest evils of our modern life. Too often the members of the same household are nothing more to each other than sharers of the same abode. They go outside to have their confidences with strangers, and frequently parents and brothers and sisters are among the last to know of any unusual experience through which they have been brought. Thus the home becomes little more than a small hotel, and the helpful counsel of the parents and the other members of the family is entirely lost. Sure I am that many of the young people who go astray in modern business or society might have been kept from evil courses if only they had utilized the blessing of this home cabinet; while, on the other hand, the hearts of parents would have been kept fresh and healthy if their children had but made them partakers of the details of their day's doings. The most natural thing in the world for a little child is to tell where he has been, and what he has been about; and when he grows up into manhood there is something wrong with him, or something wrong at home, if that healthy custom is abandoned. Either he has begun to go to places of which he is ashamed to speak, or his parents and the other members of the household have not been careful to maintain the happiness of home to such a degree that it will be in his estimation more attractive than all other localities. Let me urge, therefore, upon those who, like Ruth, must be away all the day, to engage in nothing and to go to no place of which they would be ashamed to speak in the evening to father or mother or sisters; and let me entreat the parents and members of families generally to vie with each other in their efforts to make home happy for those who are pulling at the business oar, and "toiling in rowing" all the day. Sisters, why should you reserve your winning smiles and patient attention and willing practice of accomplishments for the party outside, or for the casual visitors who come to call upon you, and show yourselves petulant, discourteous, disobliging, and generally unamiable to your own brothers? Do you not realize that much of the molding of their characters is in your hands? and if they fall into evil courses, what will you have to say at last when the Lord asks you, "Where are your brothers?" Perhaps if you had cared to make yourself attractive to them, they might not now have been wanderers from their fathers' houses. And you, young men, who are living at home, be thankful that you have still a father and a mother to whom you can go with all your concerns, and

who are still able and willing to be your advisers. Do not despise their wisdom; do not trample upon their love. You will never know the worth of them until you lose them; and then O what a misery it will be to you to reflect that you slighted their counsel and made light of their affection while they lived.

Parents, you, too, have a solemn responsibility here. Do not allow yourselves even to seem to be troubled when your young people come to you for advice. Do not account their affairs as too insignificant for you to be interested in; hear them with patient, real, loving, attention, and give them the best wisdom you can command. Encourage them to come to you with their concerns, and beware of drawing the cord of authority so tight that it will snap, and leave you without so much as influence. Remember that as young people grow up to manhood and womanhood they must be guided rather than governed by you; and if you would gain their confidences and keep them, you will succeed best when you seem least eager to demand them as of right. As one has very wisely said: "Young men and women, conscious of growing personal responsibility, will not tolerate being treated as mere children, and will fret against what appear to them as unnecessary restraints. But it is possible by wise management to obtain all desirable information without a display of authority, and without arousing antagonism. Knowing the tender interest of their parents' hearts in all their experiences, sons and daughters will love to return home and voluntarily tell all the story of the day, incidents humorous vexing, or encouraging, and those fireside reviews of life will be the most delightful part of their time." (Braden. *The Beautiful Gleaner*, p. 478.).

Let me point out to you now, in the second place, the true ideal of marriage. Naomi put it precisely right when she said to Ruth: "Shall I not seek rest for thee, that it may be well with thee?" The rest of the wife should be in the affection of the husband, and the rest of the husband should be in the love of the wife. Each should have comfort in the support and confidence of the other. The husband should be always sure of the sympathy and co-operation of the wife; and the wife should be able to rely implicitly on being understood and trusted--and, if need be, defended--by the husband. They should be so identified--or, to take the smaller and better word, so one with each other--that whatever comes to one comes to both; that neither should add to the affliction of the other by putting his or her own weight on to the load that has to be borne; that, in short, they should divide each other's burdens and double each other's joys. The confidence of each in the other should be so absolute and entire as to give rest to the heart of each, whether in the trials of business, or in the "many things" that are so troublous and distracting in household management. Unless this be the case a marriage is shorn of its highest glory, its greatest helpfulness, and its holiest influence. And yet, alas! how often it is far below this beautiful ideal! It is entered upon too frequently without knowledge of each other's characters, aptitudes, and idiosyncrasies, and from merely secular motives, because of the position which it will command or the advantages which it will bring, and without any idea of mutual helpfulness. And then after a time the illusion is dispelled; disappointment leads to alienation, alienation to unhappiness, unhappiness to divorce, and that, again, sometimes--so little valued are the lessons of experience--to a repetition of the same miserable circle with other parties. I say nothing now of the evil of the short and easy method of obtaining divorces which is the shame of our country, and which is twin-sister to Mormonism itself; but I do cry out with all my might against those thoughtless alliances and mercantile marriages which end so frequently in divorce, and I implore young people to view this matter, "not lightly or unadvisedly, but reverently, discreetly, soberly, and in the fear of the Lord." I

am old-fashioned enough to believe in love, and I am Christian enough to believe that no Christian can be truly happy in an alliance in which Christ is not supreme. Therefore I would lay down two principles: to all alike I say, do not marry one whom you do not love--that is the law of nature; then to the Christian I add this other: do not marry one who has no love to Christ--that is the law of grace. Comply with these two precepts, and other things will soon naturally and easily adjust themselves; but without these essentials nothing will go right for any length of time. Above all, young woman, never marry an infidel to convert him, or a drunkard to steady him, or a rake to reform him; for if you do, you sacrifice yourself for nothing, inasmuch as you will entail misery on yourself without any certainty of benefiting him. Let the reformation come first, and then there will be more assurance of happiness. But now just a word, in conclusion, on the value of character. Boaz said to Ruth, "All the city of my people doth know that thou art a worthy woman ;" and his conviction that she was indeed a noble woman led to his interest in her welfare, and ultimately to his making her his wife. But Ruth had not been very long in Bethlehem, and the fact that so soon she had gained such a reputation speaks volumes for her deportment. Character cannot long be hid. If it be good, it will reveal itself in worthy conduct; but if it be bad, it will let itself out, in spite of any hypocritical efforts to hide itself. Through some little chink of unconscious and, therefore, unwatched evil, it will surely come to light. The daily life of Ruth in the field was enough to let all know the sort of woman that she was. Thus character and reputation are closely interlinked. The one is the flower, the other is the fragrance: but to have the fragrance rich, you must have the flower perfect. So, to have the reputation good, you must not look to that first, but to the character, and then the reputation will take care of itself--nay, even in apparently questionable circumstances, as here the character will come to the rescue of the reputation. How important, then, it is to have a good character! It is not only the highway to success in life, it is in itself the highest success. Cultivate good character, therefore; and that you may do that in the right way, unite yourself to Jesus by living faith; then go on after the plan of Peter, "add to your faith courage, to your courage knowledge, to your knowledge temperance, to your temperance patience, and to your patience godliness, to your godliness brotherly kindness, and to your brotherly kindness love ;" and then you will be living epistles of Christ, known and read of all men, carrying in your deportment the infallible endorsement of the genuineness of your piety.

05 The Loving Marriage (Ruth 4)

CHAPTER V THE LOVING MARRIAGE

Ruth 4:1-22 In Palestine all important cities were surrounded by strong walls. This was necessary for the defense of the inhabitants from the assaults of robbers, and nightly everything of value that could be stolen was brought in from the outside for safekeeping. The only entrance or egress was by the gate, which was open throughout the day but closed at nightfall, and which, from the continual going out and coming in of the people by it, came to be a favorite place of resort for the community. The passage in which it stood was commonly vaulted, having a chamber over it, and so it was shady and cool, furnishing an agreeable lounging-place for all who sought for any reason to linger beneath its shelter. There were also chambers or recesses at the sides, and "a void place" of some considerable extent, (1 Kings 22:10) where the people could conveniently assemble in considerable numbers. Thither went the curious to see and to be seen, and to hear all the news of the neighborhood. Thither the friend went to meet those whom he was expecting from the country, or to accompany those who were setting out upon a journey. There the markets were held; there, too, all legal business was transacted, in a very primitive yet wholly satisfactory manner.

Many of these old customs continue to the present day, and the vivid description given by Dr. W. M. Thomson of what he had often seen in Jaffa may help us to realize more thoroughly the nature of the court which Boaz extemporized for the securing of the object which he had so much at heart. Says our venerable friend: "In 1834 I resided for several months in this city (Jaffa), and, to pass away the time, frequently came out in the afternoon 'to the gate through the city, and prepared my seat in the street.' There the governor, the kady, and the elders of the people assembled daily, 'in a void place,' and held an extemporaneous divan, at which affairs of every kind were discussed and settled with the least possible ceremony. But recently from America, I was greatly amused with this novel open-air court, conducted amid the din, confusion, and uproar of a thronged gate-way--men, women, and children jostling each other, horses prancing, camels growling, donkeys braying, as they passed in and out of the gate; but nothing could interrupt the proceedings or disturb the judicial gravity of the court. The whole scene, with all its surroundings, was wholly Oriental, and withal had about it an air of remote antiquity which rendered it doubly interesting." (Southern Palestine and Jerusalem, pp. 29, 30) To the gate of Bethlehem, then, Boaz went straight up from his threshing-floor. Naomi had not misjudged when she averred that he would not rest until he had brought matters to a head. It was the first business that he set about that day; and when he reached the gate, he sat down on one of the seats in its vicinity with the air of one who had an important duty to discharge. By-and-by he observed the Goel of Naomi coming near, on his way out into the field, and called to him, "Ho, such a one! turn aside, sit down here." The original words, translated "such a one," are very peculiar, and some have supposed that they were an ordinary legal formula, like the John Doe or Richard Roe of old English documents; while others have preferred to take them as we take indefinite initials, like A. B. C. or M. N., and the like. They are in Hebrew "P'loni almoni," the former derived from a word meaning to mark out or

distinguish, and the latter from a term which signifies to hide; so that both together seem to give the notion of one who is indicated, though in a certain sense concealed; and it is interesting to note that he who, as we shall presently see, would not marry Ruth lest he should mar his own inheritance while perpetuating the name of Mahlon, is not even named in this narrative, and has passed into utter oblivion.

Thus accosted by Boaz, this anonymous Goel sat down to await developments, wondering, perhaps, what was coming next, and only whetted to a more eager curiosity as he saw Boaz pick out ten men of the elders of the city, and place them in formal order, that they might be both witnesses and judges. Every city was governed by elders, and perhaps ten were needed to make what we should call a quorum, even as among modern Jews it is said that ten are required to constitute a synagogue. In any case, we may be sure that Boaz knew what he was about, and proceeded in everything according to consuetudinary law. The court having been thus constituted, Boaz began the business by addressing the unnamed kinsman thus: "The parcel of land which was our brother Elimelech's, Naomi, that is come again out of the country of Moab, has determined to sell, and I have said, I will uncover thine ear to say 'Buy it, before the inhabitants and before the elders of my people. If thou wilt redeem it, redeem it; but if thou wilt not redeem it, then tell me, that I may know: for there is none to redeem it beside thee; and I am after thee. And he said, I will redeem it. Then said Boaz, What day thou buyest the field of the hand of Naomi, thou must buy it also,'" or as some read, "thou must buy also Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of the dead to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance. And the kinsman said, I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I mar mine own inheritance: redeem thou my right to thyself ;" or rather, perhaps, "redeem thou instead of me."

Now, to understand all this, it is necessary to recapitulate some things which we have already advanced concerning the duties of the Goel. The Jewish nation was a theocracy, that is to say, Jehovah was the King, and the land belonged to Him. Under His sanction it had been originally appropriated to the people, according to their tribes and families by lot. But they could not do with it as they chose, and it never could be alienated from the family to whom it fell at first. If the possessor for the time became poor he might sell it, but never out and out, for it was always to revert to himself or his heirs at the year of jubilee; nay, if he were able to redeem it before that time he might do so, or if being himself unable, his next of kin had the means of buying it back, he had the privilege of redeeming it. Again, when the proprietor offered his land for sale it was the privilege of the next of kin to become the purchaser, and no other kinsman could buy it until he had formally given up that which was by law his privilege. This was the law of property, but side by side with it, and, as it would seem, intimately connected with it, there was also that of the Levirate marriage, to the effect that if an Israelite married and died without children, his brother should marry his widow, and if a son should be born of that marriage that son was to take the name of the deceased man and inherit his estate, so that the property should not be alienated. Now, when the nearest of kin to such a widow was also her brother-in-law, the widow and the land, through the operation of the two laws, would go together; but when there was no brother-in-law, and yet a childless widow, the Goel who redeemed the land was also expected by custom to marry the widow. This was not laid down by the letter of the statute, but it seems to have been regarded as implied in the spirit of it, and so it became the custom, or what the Scottish people would call "the use and wont."

Now this last was the case of Naomi. In her poverty she wanted to sell for the interval between that date and the year of jubilee the land that had belonged to Elimelech, and this had become known to Boaz. We may suppose, in fact, that Naomi had taken Ruth into her confidence, and that Boaz, having learned from her what her mother-in-law proposed, had seen in that a way to the immediate settlement of the business, for Ruth was as much concerned as Naomi, because, if a kinsman purchased the land, he came also under obligation thereby to make Ruth his wife. Now, so long as this anonymous Goel knew nothing more than that Naomi wanted to sell the land, he expressed his willingness to become the redeemer of it, but the moment he heard that the purchase involved also the obligation to marry Ruth, he renounced his privilege in favor of Boaz, who was the kinsman next after him. The reason which he gave for doing this is expressed in these words, "lest I mar mine own inheritance ;" and it has been explained in two or three different ways. Some have supposed that he had a wife and children already; others, that he feared the risk of losing the perpetuation of his own name in securing that of Elimelech; and others still that his means could not stand the drain upon them that would be made by the support of Naomi and Ruth, in addition to the finding of the purchase-money. Dr. Cassell suggests that he was moved simply by superstition, and feared that as Mahlon and Chilion had died so soon after their marriage with two daughters of Moab, a similar fate might befall him if he married Ruth. It is, perhaps, impossible now to say definitely what he referred to. One thing, however, is very clear, namely, that his whole thought was about his own inheritance, and thus selfishness was at the root of his decision. But, in any case, his determination must have been an immense relief to Boaz, who, despite the cool, matter-of-fact way in which he appeared to conduct himself throughout, was far from being indifferent to the issue. I have no doubt that he had a few uncomfortable moments after he heard the Goel say, in regard to the land, "I will redeem it," but when, after he had put the full case before his rival the irrevocable words were spoken, "Redeem thou instead of me," then would come a great gladness into his heart. Still he did not show his feelings before the time, and for the formal completion of the transaction there was yet to be gone through an interesting ceremony, which had fallen into abeyance before this book was written, but which helps to prove that there was an intimate connection between the law of the Goel and that of the brother-in-law. The brother-in-law might, if he so chose, refuse to marry the widow of his brother, but if he did so, here is the statute: "If the man like not to take his brother's wife, then let his brother's wife go up to the gate unto the elders, and say, My husband's brother refuseth to raise up unto his brother a name in Israel, he will not perform the duty of my husband's brother. Then the elders of his city shall call him, and speak unto him; and if he stand to it, and say, I like not to take her; then shall his brother's wife come unto him in the presence of the elders, and loose his shoe from off his foot and spit in his face, and shall answer and say, So shall it be done unto that man that will not build up his brother's house, and his name shall be called in Israel, The house of him that hath his shoe loosed." Now, in connection with that quotation from the Book of Deuteronomy, let us read what is said here in the Book of Ruth: "Now this was the manner in former time in Israel concerning redeeming and concerning changing, for to confirm all things; a man plucked off his shoe and gave it to his neighbor: and this was a testimony in Israel." This old custom originated in the fact that when a man took possession of land he planted his foot--of course with the shoe on it--on the soil. Thus the shoe became the symbol of ownership, and by handing that to another, a man renounced his own title to the land which he was selling, and transferred it to the person who received the shoe. But there was a wide difference between a man's taking off his shoe of his own

accord, and having it plucked off by another. I may remove my hat to salute another without any disgrace; but he who knocks my hat from my head insults me. So the plucking off of the shoe by another was an ignominious thing; and thus the Goel who refused to marry his brother's widow was publicly disgraced; and the indignity was further intensified by his being spit upon by his sister-in-law, and by his entailing on himself and his children the opprobrious nickname of "Barefoot," or "Baresole," in all coming time. Now, in the case before us, Boaz did not proceed to such extremities. So far as appears, neither Ruth nor Naomi was present during the proceedings at the gate, and the Goel was permitted to take off his own shoe, while the rest of the penalty was dispensed with. Boaz did not wish to provoke antagonism by proceeding to extremities, or it may be that it was only in the case of the brother-in-law refusing "to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance" that the law was carried out to the letter. Or perhaps Cox is right when he says: "His motive in thus sparing his kinsman is not supply, I suppose, either a kindly consideration for a man closely related to himself, or his love for Ruth, but also the conviction that an Israelite, caring only for the letter of the law and not for its spirit, might honestly doubt whether he were bound to marry his ' brother's' widow, when that widow was a daughter of Moab. True, Ruth had come to put her trust under the shadow of Jehovah's wings. True, she was known as a good and brave woman in all the city of Bethlehem. But none the less she was by birth an alien, one of the heathen women with whom the sons of Israel were forbidden to intermarry. The law was doubtful: if the appeal to it were pushed too far he might defeat his own end." So he let the Goel pull off his own shoe, and when he had received it he said to the elders, and to the crowd of people who had by this time assembled round them at the gate: "Ye are witnesses this day, that I have bought all that was Elimelech's, and all that was Chilion's and Mahlon's, of the hand of Naomi. Moreover, Ruth the Moabitess have I purchased to be my wife, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance, that the name of the dead be not cut off from among his brethren and from the gate of his place: ye are witnesses this day." To this the elders gave formal response, "We are witnesses," and they and the people vied with each other in their benediction of the man who had thus nobly performed the kinsman's part. They use, indeed, the words which have become the recognized formula of benediction in a Jewish marriage; and which, though here, perhaps, employed for the first time, are for that very reason the more significant, inasmuch as they put Ruth the Moabitess side by side with Rachel and Leah, and so indicate that the people of Bethlehem were prepared to receive her into the covenant of promise and the commonwealth of Israel, as no longer a stranger and foreigner, but as a daughter in the household of faith. So Boaz openly and legally made Ruth his wife, and the fruit of the marriage was a son, who is called the Goel or redeemer of Naomi (Ruth 4:14), because he was accounted her grandson, as standing to her in the place of the son of Mahlon. That this was the light in which he was regarded by all the people is clearly revealed, not only by the tenderness with which Naomi treated him, but also by the fact that it is to her rather than to Ruth that the congratulations of the women of Bethlehem are especially addressed; and by their giving him the name Obed, a servant, indicating that in their view he would be a constant minister to the comfort of Naomi in the time of her old age. Indeed, as Cox, borrowing and condensing the comment of Cassell on this part of the chapter, has said, "It is one of the many fine points of the story that its concluding sentences are almost wholly devoted, not to the young and happy wife and mother, but to Naomi, who had suffered so many calamities, and who, by the piety and resignation with which she bore them, had drawn Ruth from the idolatries of Moab. It is Naomi, not Ruth, whom the women her neighbors' congratulate on the birth of Ruth's son. In him

they see Naomi's Goel--Ruth had already hers in Boaz--and they pray that as he grows up he may restore her to her former happiness, and be the stay and gladness of her old age." Yet Ruth is not forgotten, for she is spoken of as Naomi's "daughter-in-law, which loveth thee, which is better to thee than seven sons." We are permitted to see, also, ere the book closes, that in the course of time the little boy "whom Naomi laid in her bosom" became the progenitor of David the darling of Israel, and through him of Jesus the Savior of the world. Truly, on that wedding-day, as Boaz led home his bride amid the benedictions of his friends and neighbors, some prophetic seer might have addressed her thus:

"Thou knowest not the glorious race, Sweet Ruth! that shall be thine;

How many kings thou shalt embrace In thy illustrious line. The fountains of Hebraic song Are in thy heart, fair Ruth!

Fountains whose tides are deep and strong In deathless love and truth. The great in wisdom and in song, The bard of deathless fame, A mighty and a warlike throng Shall rise to bless thy name. No one, at last, of lowly birth, Shall crown thy long increase, Of lowly birth, yet not of earth-- The glorious Prince of Peace."

Yes, thou beautiful Gleaner! lovely and beloved, we greet thee, too, as a mother of our Lord! The ideal woman of the Old Testament, we place thee side by side with the Mary of the New, while we bow in lowly reverence before Him who is the Son and yet the Lord of both. Not every story that begins so sadly as this did has so sweet and pleasant an ending. Not always are virtue, piety, constancy, and self-sacrifice so visibly rewarded upon the earth. But we are not on that account to think the less of the providence of God; for virtue is not to be pursued because of its reward, and right is to be done for its own sake--nay, rather, for the sake of God. Then, when the end shall come--not here, but hereafter--we shall see the vindication of Jehovah, and forget all else in the "Well done" of an approving Judge.

I linger only to give point to two lessons which lie on the surface of this narrative. The first is, that in the matter of marriage, everything ought to be public, open and above-board. How nobly does Boaz appear all through these transactions! He is careful not to infringe upon the right of another, and he contracts for marriage openly before the elders of the people. There was nothing clandestine about his procedure. This was no runaway match, to be formally made in secret haste and bitterly lamented in lifelong leisure. He did not go away from Bethlehem to have it celebrated, without the knowledge of friends and neighbors, but he went about it in the statutory way, and did all things decently and in order. Now, here is an example for young people in similar circumstances. There may be exceptional cases, but, as a rule, clandestine marriages are to be condemned; and if they turn out well, those who have contracted them should thank a gracious Providence rather than congratulate themselves on their own wisdom. There is generally something wrong when either the one party or the other wishes the relationship to be kept a secret; and the very proposal to do that should be itself a danger-signal that ought at once to bring things to a halt; for, as one has well said, "Whenever there is anything in marriage or in its preliminaries that needs smothering up, the wind is sown, and the whirlwind will need to be reaped." Nor can I withhold here the expression of my opinion that the facilities given by the marriage laws, in this State, at least, for the contracting of such clandestine marriages, have much to do with the increase of divorces among us; and I long to see one general marriage law for the

whole nation, which, by requiring public notice to be given beforehand in the place where the parties are known, and by insisting on the production before the clergyman of a certificate that such notice has been given, shall relieve the ministers of the gospel from the applications so constantly made to them to unite in matrimony those who are utter strangers both to them and to the city in which they dwell. Such a marriage law--the same for all the States of the Union, and enacted by the Houses of Congress--would, in my judgment, be one very effectual method of dealing with the marriage problem; but so long as magistrates among us, without any public notice or investigation, can marry all and sundry that come to them, and so long as even ministers of the gospel are sometimes over-persuaded to do what their better judgment disapproves, lest, perhaps, worse consequences should follow, so long we must expect that the institution of the family shall be degraded among us; and that means, ultimately, the degradation of all that is wholesome and conservative in the state.

Finally, we may learn from all this that self-sacrifice is self-saving, and that self-seeking is self-loving. Orpah went back to Moab, and she is heard of no more. Ruth clave to Naomi, and she is canonized among the Old Testament saints, and has a place among the ancestors of our Lord. This nameless Goel was afraid lest his name should perish while he was seeking to perpetuate Mahlon's, and it has perished in spite of his refusal to be the Goel of Naomi. Boaz did what he declined, and lo! his name stands in everlasting honor, on the first page of the New Testament. "He that loveth his life will lose it, and he that will lose his life for my sake, will keep it unto life eternal." Selfishness outwits itself, but self-sacrifice for Christ's sake issues in the highest gain. Yet if we make the sacrifice for the sake of the gain, it is not self-sacrifice but selfishness. It must be made for Christ's sake, and then Christ himself will be our reward.

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