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THE STORY OF RUTH.

REV. ASHTON OXENDEN.



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THE STORY OF RUTH.

BY THE

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PRAYER," &c.

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TO THE
MORNING CONGREGATION AT PLUCKLEY,
TO WHOM THE SUBSTANCE OF THIS
VOLUME WAS PREACHED
IN THE FORM OF LECTURES, THIS
Story of Ruth
IS NOW DEDICATED,
WITH A PRAYER THAT OTHERS, AS WELL AS
THEMSELVES, MAY FIND IN IT
SOMETHING TO INTEREST THEIR MINDS,
AND TOUCH THEIR HEARTS.



CONTENTS.

CHAP.	PAGE
1.—THE FAMINE	1
2.—THE EMIGRANTS	13
3.—THE FAREWELL	25
4.—THE RIGHT CHOICE	35
5.—THE RETURN	45
6.—THE STRANGER IN THE HARVEST FIELD .	62
7.—THE SUCCESSFUL GLEANER	82
8.—THE HAPPY MARRIAGE	102
9.—THE FORFEITED INHERITANCE REDEEMED .	122

CHAPTER I.

THE FAMINE.

RUTH I. 1, 2. Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land : and a certain man of Bethlehem-Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons.

And the name of the man was Elimelech, and the name of his wife Naomi, and the name of his two sons Mahlon and Chilion, Ephrathites of Bethlehem-Judah.

A PARENT uses different methods to instruct his children ; for if he always made a practice of teaching every lesson in the same way, it would soon

become a weariness, and all his efforts would be to little purpose. Now, God seems to act on the same principle with regard to us His children. The Bible is our great lesson-book for eternity: and how many means does our heavenly Father use to bring home instruction to our dull hearts!

Sometimes, for instance, He gives us plain commands for our daily conduct. Sometimes He sets warnings before us, that we may be kept back from committing sin. Or else He threatens us, plainly showing us the danger we are in, if we live unholy lives. Or, on the other hand, He puts before us some precious promise, to cheer us on in His happy service.

But there is yet another method which He sometimes adopts, which is

very instructive, and at the same time most deeply interesting. He teaches us by different Scripture histories, or stories. It is about one of these that I mean now to try and interest you—the Story of Ruth. And as we are sure that God placed it in the Bible for our benefit, let us endeavour to draw from it some useful hints for our own conduct. But let me stop you for a moment, my dear Reader, and ask you to lift up your heart to God with some such prayer as this,—“O Lord, grant that I may be able to draw out some precious truths from this portion of thy word.”

In the days of the Judges (that is, above three thousand years ago—long before our Saviour came upon earth, when the Israelites were ruled over by

certain men called Judges), there was a Jewish family living in the town of Bethlehem, who were tolerably well off, and belonged to the upper ranks of life. This family consisted of four persons, Elimelech, and his wife Naomi, and their two sons Mahlon and Chilion. The land in which they were living was a very fruitful country. It was often spoken of as "a land flowing with milk and honey," that means, "abounding in all the richest productions of the earth." This, you know, was the chosen country, which the Lord had made over to Abraham, six hundred years before, and to his family after him. It was the finest spot in the whole earth, the spot which God fixed upon as the dwelling-place of His own peculiar people, the Jews.

The quiet little town of Bethlehem was about ten miles from Jerusalem. This was the very place which was afterwards honoured by becoming the birth-place of our blessed Lord. And here, we may suppose, Elimelech and his family lived happily enough. They belonged to a people who were under God's special protection — the only people at that time who knew anything at all of the one true God. The bright rays of His truth seemed to shine upon them, whilst "darkness covered the earth, and gross darkness the people."

In those days of ignorance, the Jew had reason to thank God that he was born a Jew. It was no small privilege to be numbered among the Lord's peculiar people, to be one of His family, and to live under His imme-

diate care. Happy were the Jews ! To them belonged " the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises." Happy was Elimelech and his family ! They could read those six Books, which now stand first in our Bible, and which were *the only ones then written*. And from these they could learn what great things God had done for their nation ; how He had made known to them His will ; and taught them in what manner they should serve Him. They had also in the land of Israel the opportunity of assembling at stated seasons for public worship, when they could pour out their hearts together in prayer and praise.

But if the Jew had reason to be

thankful, how much greater reason have *we* ! If Elimelech's family was a happy one, how much happier may we be—we Christians—we to whom a Saviour has been revealed—we, who are inheritors of a better land than the land of Canaan, an eternal inheritance, a dearly purchased possession, a country whither our Lord Himself is gone to prepare a home for us !

How little do we think of our many and great blessings ! We possess the Bible, God's own word, to light us through this dark world. We have a Leader, greater than Moses, who has opened the gate of heaven to all true believers ; not a mere deliverer from earthly bondage, but a Saviour from sin and everlasting death. We have God's house, as a shelter to us, where

we meet every now and then, to warm each other's hearts, to strengthen each other's faith, and to put up our joint prayers to Him who loves us.

Elimelech was a Jew. We are not told however whether he was a religious Jew. But if not, how little did the mere name profit him ! And if *our* hearts are not given to Christ—if we are not serving God with real earnestness—how little good will *the name* of Christian do us ! Oh, better, far better, to be blind ignorant heathens, than to know God without loving Him ; to belong outwardly to Christ's people, but not to have His own blessed mark upon our foreheads ! Woe unto us, if after all our privileges, and all our opportunities, we are weighed in the balance, and found wanting at last !

The Bible tells us that “to whom much is given, of them shall much be required.” How then shall we, to whom such love is offered—“how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?”

But let us return to Elimelech and his household. We were thinking just now of his favoured condition in the land of Judea. But God was able to make even that fruitful land barren. We are told that it was suddenly visited by a famine. And now Elimelech’s happiness and prosperity were suddenly turned into sorrow. “The fig-tree did not blossom; neither was fruit found in the vine; the labour of the olives failed; the flock was cut off from the field, and there was no herd in the stalls.” “The merry-hearted

did sigh : all joy was darkened, the mirth of the land was gone." A heavy cloud seemed to be resting over the once happy land of Israel. God seemed to be visiting His people. Famine was one of those punishments which He had long before threatened that He would bring upon the Israelites, if they sinned against Him ; "I will make your heaven iron, and your earth as brass : and your strength shall be spent in vain ; for your land shall not yield her increase, neither shall the trees of the land yield their fruits."

How awful to be thus dealt with ! And may not God, at any moment, deal so with us ? Could He not, if He pleased, this very year, withdraw His blessing ? and then what would be the consequence ? Why, the ground

would be sown ; but no corn would spring up. We are indebted to God for every morsel of bread that we eat. It comes from His hand. He is the great Provider. Oh, how seldom we think of this ! We take our daily bread, and eat it with unthankful hearts, forgetting to acknowledge Him who is the gracious Giver of it.

Well, Elimelech suffered with the rest. He daily saw his store growing less and less. First the wheat became scarce. Then they were glad enough to make their barley into bread. Then this too began to dwindle. He thought of his family, and of the prospect that stared them in the face. Provisions got dearer and dearer, and sadness was to be seen in every countenance.

Yes, it was a sad and trying time for

them. And we shall see in the next chapter how they acted. I am afraid, their faith failed them a little; and instead of running to God for help, they ran away from Him, and betook themselves to a worldly remedy.

CHAPTER II.

THE EMIGRANTS.

RUTH I. 3. And they came into the country of Moab, and continued there. And Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died, and she was left with her two sons.

WHAT was to become of Elimelech and his family, now that their country was in so pitiable a state? Were they to remain in the land, which God had chosen for them—that land which He had so specially marked out for their portion? Were they to submit patiently to this heavy trial, believing that God would soon hear their cry.

and once more lift up the light of His countenance upon them? Were they to rely upon God's promise, which said, "The Lord knoweth the days of the godly: they shall not be confounded in the perilous times, and in *the days of dearth* they shall have enough?" Or were they to seek a home in some more favoured spot? The thought came across Elimelech, that, as there was bread enough and to spare elsewhere, the wisest thing he could do was to leave this famine-stricken land. The neighbouring country of Moab was spoken of. There there was an abundance; and there he determines to go and take up his abode.

With a heavy heart they bid farewell to the little town of Bethlehem,

which had been so long their home. There were many friends, no doubt, who were dear to them ; and these it was painful to leave behind. And sadder still was their journey ; for every step carried them farther from all they loved on earth ; and every step made them feel that their portion now was to be among strangers:

At length they reached the land of Moab. And now, the question we feel inclined to ask is, Were they wise in taking this step? For some reasons they *were* wise. There was an abundance in the land of Moab, and a scarcity in the land of Judah. Want and suffering were certain to have been their portion, if they had remained. Worldly prudence then seemed to point out some other spot as thei-

dwelling-place. But one thing they did not sufficiently consider—they were leaving behind them many of their religious advantages, and were going to sojourn in the country of Moab, which was a land of Heathens. They found a maintenance there, it is true : but there was a scarcity of spiritual food : “ not a famine of bread, nor a thirst of water, but of hearing the word of the Lord.” When they got there, they found no House of God to worship in ; no Ministers to guide them ; no godly Friends with whom they could “ take sweet counsel.”

Do you not think that often, when they were in their new home, their minds wandered back to Bethlehem, their own beloved Bethlehem ? Do you not suppose that, more than once,

the wish came across them that they had never left it? The miseries of the land which they had forsaken now seemed sweeter to them, than the joys which were opened to them in their new abode. Often, as they sat down by the plains of Moab, they “remembered Zion.” And as they tried to be cheerful, they could not help exclaiming, “How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a strange land? If I do not remember thee, O Jerusalem, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy.”

Yes, there is no doubt that Elimelech was wrong, very wrong, in leaving the land of Judah with his family, and settling in the godless country of Moab. Nothing short of *absolute neces-*

sity, and the dread of *actual starvation*, should have induced him. It is a fearful thing to set little store by our religious advantages and blessings, when 'God has given them to us.

When, for instance, a person chooses a new home, how apt he is to reckon how far he will be a gainer in a *worldly* point of view, putting aside altogether his gain or loss in *spiritual* things. How sad, if he should gain ever so much, even the whole world, and yet lose his own soul! How sad, if he should grow richer for this life, but poorer for eternity!

Again, when a servant chooses a fresh situation, is he not apt to measure the goodness of it by the wages he is to receive, instead of thinking seriously how far his soul is likely to

prosper in his new home? But take my word for it, it is of the greatest importance, in choosing a place, where you may perhaps dwell for years, to consider well whether you are likely to meet with helps, or hindrances, on your way to heaven. Now, if you should ever be called upon to make such a choice, I advise you to let it be a matter of earnest prayer to God, that He would guide and direct your steps. And then, after having done this, you will have the comfort of feeling that your situation in life is that which God Himself approves of, and in which therefore He will bless you.

And now, though this family had left the land of troubles, yet trouble still follows them in their new resting-place. They had not been long there,

before Elimelech is cut off; and Naomi is left a widow, a mourning widow, in a foreign land. There is something melancholy in the thought of this dying Jew breathing his last among strangers. It is true, he had probably a tender wife, and dutiful sons, near his dying bed. But there was no minister to tell him of his sins, to call him to repentance, and to direct him to a promised Saviour.

It is more than likely, that Elimelech's heart may have grown cold in this heathen land. For though God can keep us anywhere by His Holy Spirit, and can bless us even without the ordinary means of grace, still if we have wilfully turned our backs upon His blessings, we must expect that our souls will suffer loss, and we shall find

Him far off, when we most need His presence.

The case of Naomi was different from Elimelech's. Though *he* may have been wrong to leave Judæa, it was clearly *her* duty not to separate herself from her husband. She was a godly woman: and though the Lord strewed her path with many trials, yet He never forsook her. No doubt her aching heart was often soothed by the affectionate care of her two sons. But, most of all, she must have felt comfort in looking up to that heavenly Friend, who *was* watching over her. And something now seemed sweetly to whisper to her, "Thy Maker is thy Husband;" "The Lord preserveth the strangers; he relieveth the fatherless and widow."

Ah, dear Reader, it is in the hour of our deepest grief that our God is nearest to us. "He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him; *I will be with him in trouble.*" Oh, what a charm there is in such a promise! Better, far better, is it to be in sorrow, if Christ is with us, than to enjoy prosperity, if He is far from us. Noah cared little for the tempest around him; for God was by him in the ark. Joseph was happy in his dungeon; because God was at his side. The fiery furnace and the lions' den were places of safety and peace; because God was with His servants.

And if *you* are serving God, He will stand by you in your sharpest trials. He will be near you on your sick bed. And even if your earthly friends should

be far away, you will be able to say, "I am not alone, because the Father is with me."

Alas, how apt we are to think more of our troubles, than of the great Deliverer who is by us! Like Peter, we look at the waves and billows, and are cast down; but we forget the almighty arm that is stretched out for our support; and therefore, like him, we sink in our distress.

May God give us a more simple, humble, trusting faith, to shelter ourselves in the Lord, amidst the darkest storms of life; and to exclaim, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in

all these things we are more than conquerors, through Him that loved us."

CHAPTER III.

THE FAREWELL.

RUTH I. 4—9. And they took them wives of the women of Moab ; the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth : and they dwelled there about ten years.

And Mahlon and Chilion died also both of them ; and the woman was left of her two sons and her husband.

Then she arose with her daughters-in-law, that she might return from the country of Moab ; for she had heard in the country of Moab how that the Lord had visited his people in giving them bread.

Wherefore she went forth out of the place where she was, and her two daughters-in-law with her ; and they went on the way to return unto the land of Judah.

And Naomi said unto her two daughters-in-law, Go, return each to her mother's house: the Lord deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead, and with me.

The Lord grant you that ye may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband. Then she kissed them; and they lifted up their voice, and wept.

IN the last chapter, we spoke of Elimelech and Naomi leaving the city of Bethlehem, and emigrating to the heathen land of Moab. And we left Naomi mourning over her husband's loss.

She had still however the happiness of having her two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, to cheer her in her widowhood. And they are now desirous to marry. Alas, their choice was made from among the heathen women of Moab, women who knew nothing of the God of Israel. This was one of

the evil consequences of their having come away from their native country. But nothing can be said in the way of excuse: they were decidedly wrong. Had they never been told how far their forefather Abraham had sent for a wife for his son Isaac? Had they never heard of the solemn charge, which that same Isaac gave to the son whom he so dearly loved, "Thou shalt not take a wife of the daughters of Canaan?" True, these men would have had to travel a long distance for a wife of their own nation; but was it farther from Moab to Bethlehem, than from Bethlehem to Moab, a distance which they had both already travelled? No, it was a wrong step which they took; and they afterwards seem to have suffered for it.

We know nothing of what passed during the next ten years. But we are told that, at the end of that time, Naomi's wounds were again torn open. She is called to part with her two sons. Probably they were both carried off together by some disease which prevailed in the country.

And now none are left, but these three widows, lonely and unprotected, in the land of Moab. And did not Naomi, think you, now feel more than ever the sweetness of God's promises, and of God's presence? She was troubled on every side, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed. God's shield was over her, and underneath her were His everlasting arms.

Orpah and Ruth, you know, were heathens by birth. But they had

learnt much, I dare say, in the last ten years, concerning the one true God. And the pious example of their mother-in-law no doubt had had a softening influence upon them. Their hearts were drawn towards her; and they seem at all events to have felt no opposition to the God whom she loved and served.

A quiet consistent example, often goes a great way. It usually wins more hearts than the most powerful arguments. Think of this, my dear Reader; and if you have a husband, or a wife, or a brother, or a child, whose heart you have often tried in vain to turn, and whose state you have often wept over with the bitterest sorrow, and for whom you have offered up many an earnest prayer, then try another me-

thod. Try to win that soul *by your example*. Try to draw him gently by this means into that happy path, which you yourself have found to be the path of peace.

The time was now come, when Naomi felt very anxious to return to her native country. The famine there was over ; “ for she had heard in the country of Moab how that the Lord had visited his people in giving them bread.” There was little now to make her present residence desirable to her. She had been bereft of her partner and her children. And she more than ever sighs after the many spiritual privileges she once enjoyed among her own people.

But what was to become of her two daughters-in-law, for whom she now

felt almost a mother's affection? It is hard for them to think of leaving their home, and the land of their birth, and to go among strangers. And yet they could not bear the thought of parting with Naomi. Here then was a great conflict in their minds. Their love for their home and their kindred drew them one way; and their affection for Naomi, and their respect for Naomi's God, drew them the other way.

She sets out upon her long journey. And she had probably now arrived at an age when travelling was irksome to her. But she goes on her way with God for her Protector, and with her heart fixed on her far-off home, longing to set her feet once more within the city of Bethlehem.

She allows her daughters to start

with her, merely however that she may have the benefit of their company for a short distance. But soon came the time for parting; the sad moment when she thought to bid them farewell, perhaps for ever. Naomi thus addresses them, "Go, return each to her mother's house. The Lord deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead, and with me. The Lord grant you that ye may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband. Then she kissed them; and they lifted up their voice, and wept."

It is hard to part with those whom we love. A separation even for a time is painful. But when we part, with the feeling that we shall probably see their face no more, then the tenderest affections of the heart are torn asunder.

And yet, one day, *we must part*. The dearest earthly ties must be rent in twain. Oh, how happy those, who can feel that there is an *everlasting* bond which unites them together. Worldly circumstances, or even death, may part them for a time; but they will again meet in a happier world. One is only gone a little while before the other. They will soon stand side by side in the presence of their beloved Lord.

And this thought should lead us to seek with the greater earnestness the conversion of all who are dear to us. We should pray that they all may belong to that "one family in heaven and earth," of whom Jesus Christ is the Head. And when we choose friends or companions, we should

choose them, if possible, from among those whose friendships will last through eternity. We should love those, who belong to Christ; and think with joy of that blessed world, where there shall be no more separation; but where God's people shall enjoy the sweetest fellowship one with another through the happy ages of eternity.

CHAPTER IV.

THE RIGHT CHOICE.

RUTH 1. 10—18. And they said unto her, Surely we will return with thee unto thy people.

And Naomi said, Turn again, my daughters : why will ye go with me ? Are there yet any more sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands ?

Turn again, my daughters, go your way : for I am too old to have an husband. If I should say, I have hope, if I should have an husband also to-night, and should also bear sons ;

Would ye tarry for them till they were grown ? Would ye stay for them from having husbands ? nay, my daughters ; for it grieveth me much for your sakes that the hand of the Lord is gone out against me.

And they lifted up their voice, and wept again : and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law : but Ruth clave unto her.

And she said, Behold, thy sister-in-law is gone back unto her people, and unto her gods : return thou after thy sister-in-law.

And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee : for whither thou goest, I 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 : the Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me.

When she saw that she was stedfastly minded to go with her, then she left speaking unto her.

LET us now go back to those three broken-hearted travellers. Naomi had bid her two daughters-in-law return ; and had embraced them, as she thought, for the last time. But she did not reckon upon so strong a mark of their affection. She expected that

the parting would be painful on both sides ; but she was not at all prepared for the deep feeling which now showed itself in each of them. They seemed to feel that they could not let her go alone ; neither could they bear the thought of returning to their home, and finding her place empty. So they both purpose to journey on with her ; “ Surely we will return with thee to thy people.”

Still Naomi thinks it wrong to take them at their word. She will not take advantage of the strong feeling which for the moment filled their hearts. And she said, “ Turn again, my daughters : why will ye go with me ? Are there yet any more sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands ? Turn again, my daughters, go your way,

Or I am too old to have an husband. If I should say, I have hope, if I should have an husband also to-night, and should also bear sons, would ye tarry for them till they were grown? would ye stay for them from having husbands? Nay, my daughters, for it grieveth me much for your sakes that the hand of the Lord is gone out against me."

How kind and unselfish was Naomi's conduct! And now let us see how the two sisters-in-law acted. It will give us a little insight into their characters. Both of them shed tears of the truest sorrow. They both "lifted up their voice and wept." And then we are told, "Orpah kissed her mother-in-law; but Ruth clave unto her." The ties of home and kindred were too strong for poor undecided Orpah. She could not

resist them. And so she sorrowfully parted with Naomi, and turned away for ever from her best and dearest friend.

And now let us see how Ruth acts. She is determined to remain with her afflicted relative. Even the departure of Orpah is not enough to shake her in her resolution. Naomi tries again to persuade her not to make so great a sacrifice ; “ Behold, thy sister-in-law is gone back unto her people, and unto her gods ; return thou after thy sister-in-law.” But Ruth’s mind was quite made up, and she was resolved to share Naomi’s sorrow with her. “ Intreat me not (she says) to leave thee, or to return from following after thee ; for whither thou goest, I will go ; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge ; thy people shall

be my people, and thy God my God. Where thou diest, I will die, and there will I be buried. The Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me."

And was not Ruth's a right choice, and a happy choice too? She clave unto Naomi, because there was a loveliness in her character, that drew her heart towards her; and because she saw clearly that she was walking in the path that leads to happiness. And she longed perhaps to see something of Naomi's people, whom she had so often heard of as the people of God.

Now, does not all this show that the grace of God was already working in her heart? For no heart that is untouched by grace, will "choose rather to suffer affliction with the people of

God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season." And shall we not say too, that God was thus leading her by His providence to the enjoyment of brighter and happier days?

Happy we, if our minds are made up, as hers was, to follow the Lord and His people! Happy we, if we can turn to the world, and say, None of these things have any longer a charm for me; neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I may finish my course with joy!

Ruth never repented of that day's choice. She had decided rightly, and God blessed her in her decision. And let me ask you, How do matters stand with *you*? Have you chosen the world as your portion, or have you taken Christ and Heaven, as your one great

aim, that which you will live for now, and enjoy for ever?

But let us, before we close this chapter, fix our thoughts a moment on Orpah.

I am afraid there are a great many who have right feelings and good intentions, but they want that *decision* which is needful. So it was with Orpah. She was half-inclined to cast in her lot with Naomi. But the journey was long, and the prospect a sorrowful one; and she thought of the home she had just left. Such was the case with Lot's wife. She took the angel's advice, and escaped out of the city with her friends; but her heart and her affections were in Sodom; and she looked back with a longing eye on

what she had left behind her. Such also was the case with those disciples to whom our Lord was forced to say, "Will ye also go away?" And so it was with the Galatians, to whom St. Paul wrote, "Ye *did* run well. Who doth hinder you?"

Beware of indecision. It will not do to serve God in a half-hearted way. It will not do to halt and waver in our course. This was the ruin of Orpah: and who can doubt that she suffered bitterly for it? She returned to her home, but she found there no peace. There was no one to follow up the good instructions of her mother-in-law: no one to speak any more of that dear Friend above, on whom their thoughts had so often dwelt. How sad she must have felt! And when her thoughts

turned to bye-gone days, one can almost fancy her expressing her sadness in the words of the Christian poet :—

“ What peaceful hours I once enjoyed ;
How sweet their memory still !
But they have left an aching void,
The world can never fill.”

No, my friend, no ; the World cannot fill your heart, if it has once tasted of those higher joys which Christ bestows. Pleasures may amuse you ; friends may comfort you ; the busy employments of life may occupy you ; but these cannot *satisfy* a soul that has once been lifted up to God. In His service alone there is peace now ; and in His presence there will be fulness of joy hereafter, and at His right hand there will be pleasures for evermore.

CHAPTER V.

THE RETURN.

RUTH I. 19—22. So they two went until they came to Bethlehem. And it came to pass when they were come to Bethlehem, that all the city was moved about them, and they said, Is this Naomi?

And she said unto them, Call me not Naomi, call me Mara: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me.

I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty: why then call ye me Naomi, seeing the Lord hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me?

So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess her daughter-in-law with her, which returned out of the country of Moab: and they came to Bethlehem in the beginning of barley harvest.

ORPAH having turned back, Naomi and Ruth proceed onward on their lonely journey. What a helpless pair! By this time Naomi must have been advanced in years; and her strength had been pulled down by the many and severe trials which she had passed through. Ruth was young; but she too had drunk of the bitter cup of affliction. Both of them were poor. And many a one, who met them on their way, must have wondered what could be the errand on which these two widows could be going. Anxiety and distress were marked upon their countenances; and there was something in their manner and appearance, which plainly shewed that they had seen better and happier days.

After many a weary step, they come

within the borders of the land of Israel. This was a strange land to Ruth: but Naomi felt she was treading her own native soil, the land of her earlier years. As it was now the time of year when the season of harvest was just beginning, every field proved to them that the report which had reached them in the country of Moab was true—that the Lord had once more “visited His people in giving them bread.” At length they come within sight of Bethlehem, Naomi’s home, the city she had so often spoken of to her daughters-in-law, when living in the land of Moab—the home too to which she had so often wished to return.

They had not been long in the city, before the news of their arrival got noised about; and Naomi’s old ac-

quaintances soon gathered around her, to inquire concerning her state, and to bid her welcome to Bethlehem again. The arrival of the two women was the talk everywhere. It was in everybody's mouth that Naomi, who had been so long away, and was thought to be dead perhaps, and whom they never expected to see again, was now come among them. And great was the surprise of her friends to see her in so altered a condition. She was so much broken by her afflictions, and so reduced in circumstances, that they could scarcely believe their own eyes, or think that this was the same person whom they had formerly seen so fresh, and fair, and gay. "Is this Naomi?" they exclaimed. Is this the wife of Elimelech, and the happy mother of a family, who

used to be clothed so well, and is now clad in such a poor and sorrowful dress? who used to be attended with maidens to wait upon her, and is now alone? Can a few years have made such a change in her? “Is this Naomi?” So unlike is the rose when it is withered, to what it was when it was blooming!

And so it may be with any one of us. How great a change may a few years make in our condition! The man, who is now in the full enjoyment of health and strength, may soon be bowed down, and may be called to pass the remainder of his days in pain and weakness. Some one who is now doing well in the world, and “flourishing like a green bay tree,” who says in his prosperity, “I shall never be moved,”

may in one moment be reduced to poverty. If any one of us could fly away, and return to his home after an absence of ten or twenty years, would not things wear a very altered appearance? Another would probably be occupying the chimney corner. Though we should see about the place here and there an old face, yet how many new ones would there be, and how many missing! Many who are now young and hearty, would be sleeping beneath the green turf!

But there is *one* change which would be indeed a matter of joy. Perhaps some of our friends and neighbours, who are now living without God, careless about their souls, having "a name to live," but in fact spiritually dead, who meet us in the house of God

week after week, but go away untouched—perhaps we should find some of these altered men and women. The grace of God may have meanwhile awakened them. They may have seen their need of a Saviour, and have found in Him a happiness which they never knew before. And then we should exclaim, “Is this so and so, whom I remember so careless, and so set against true religion?” Or, “Can that be another who was once nothing better than a proud self-righteous Pharisee, but now a humble, believing Christian?”

May God, in the next few years, be pleased to do great things in our families and neighbourhoods! May He work mightily in the hearts of those who are now far from Him, living

only for this world! May He turn that thoughtless brother, or that giddy sister, or that wayward child, who are thinking only of the joys of earth! May He bring many souls to Himself by such means as He sees fit to employ!

But we must go back to Naomi, and hear the mournful account she gives of herself: "And she said unto them, Call me not *Naomi*; call me *Mara*." Now, most of the Jewish names have a meaning. "*Naomi*" meant *pleasant*; and "*Mara*" signified *bitter*. "Call me not Naomi; that name no longer suits me; for all my pleasant things are laid waste. Mara will be a more fitting name for me now; for I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit. The Almighty

hath dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty; why then call ye me Naomi, seeing the Lord hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me?"

Is my reader one who is ready to say, My name is "Mara;" bitterness has been my portion; my brightest hopes have been disappointed; my plans have failed; every earthly spring of comfort has been dried up. Then pitiable indeed is your state, if you have no consolation beyond what this world can offer you. And yet, I believe, there are thousands of aching hearts, which are seeking only earthly remedies to relieve them. Ah, you may try them all, and they will chase away your grief perhaps for a moment;

but they will never heal your wound. The blood may be stanchèd for a time ; but the aching sore remains. Let me tell you, there is in heaven a Great Healer. There is a Physician there, who can heal the soul, and who asks you with a voice of tenderness, " Wilt thou be made whole ? Bring your wounded heart to me, and I will ease it. Tell me of all your troubles. Pour out every sorrow into my bosom." Yes, Jesus can, and will, heal you. He who said to the Widow of Nain, " Weep not ;" and to the troubled sea, " Be still ; can in one moment dry up all your tears, and give peace to your soul. If you have never gone to Him in your affliction, go to Him now : and you will find Him a very present help in trouble.

But perhaps this may meet the eye

of one of God's dear children. You love your heavenly Father, and yet His afflicting hand is upon you. Fear not: your Saviour is near you; you have the comfort too of feeling that everything, even your present suffering, is working a far more "exceeding and eternal weight of glory." These stormy waves are bearing you up all the nearer to heaven. How blessed is it to feel that it is a Father's hand that is smiting you. He holds the rod, and not one blow too many will fall upon you. There is love and mercy in every stroke. Oh, it is better, far better, to be one of *God's* afflicted ones, than to be one of the *world's* favoured ones. Blessed are they that weep now, for they shall be comforted.

We often fancy that our own trials

are harder to bear, than those which fall to the lot of any one else. The truth is, when we ourselves are called upon to suffer, we can then taste every single grain of bitterness that is in the cup. Each separate cut makes us smart; and therefore our own wounds have a pang, which we imagine others do not feel. This is a very natural mistake; but we should take care that it does not lead us to have hard thoughts of God, and to fancy that we are of all men the most miserable.

Instead of giving up ourselves to our sorrow, it is good to feel that there are other mourners in the world besides ourselves. It is good to remember how many blessings are still left to us; how much heavier are the afflictions of others, and how much heavier *might have been*

our own ! Above all, it is well to carry up our thoughts to that best and most tried of sufferers, who so meekly and cheerfully endured the very essence of anguish for our sakes, and who seemed to say to us, as He hung upon the cross, "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by ? Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me ?" It is a great secret, a happy discovery, if we can go, and lay our troubles in the bosom of our Lord, and find in Him a peace which shall dry up every tear.

Alas, poor Naomi ! Her heart was full of sorrow ; but there was a "needs be" for all she suffered. Many years before, she had walked through the streets of Jerusalem with a happy countenance, in the enjoyment of this

world's comforts, and the smiles of many friends. She now returns to it, poor and sorrowful; having lost her partner and her children, and all that seemed to make this life worth having. And yet, if Naomi is now in heaven, do you think she feels that she had one pang too many, or one sorrow too heavy? Does she feel that God dealt harshly with her? Oh, no; it was the discipline she needed, the kind chastisement of a loving Father, who, whilst he thus weaned her from earthly things, desired to see her heart fixed on better things above.

Naomi's change of condition must have been a great trial to her; to feel although once so well off, she almost an object of charity; to see some, who used to be her

friends, now looking coldly upon her. It was hard to bear this ; but grace supported her ; aye, and taught her an important lesson too—that the smiles and friendships of men are but brittle reeds to lean upon, but that God is an unchanging, real Friend, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever, a Friend born for adversity.

Reader, have you found this Friend, this tried Friend, this Friend in need ? Christ is the penitent's Friend, the Comforter of the sorrowful, the Friend of the friendless. Learn to go to Him in every trial, and to shelter yourself in Him, when dangers threaten you. Then will your sorrow be turned into joy. In your darkest hours you will feel that there is light. And though you may see every earthly comfort, one

after another, drying up before **your** very eyes, you will feel that there is **a** Fountain out of sight from which **you** may draw daily never-ceasing streams of comfort. “Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vine; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat: the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stall; yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.”

We have seen that Naomi was heavily afflicted; but she was not stripped of all. She had her beloved Ruth still with her; and she had become more than a daughter to her.

And if God has afflicted *you*; if he has torn away some dear ones from

you ; and yet has in mercy left you one friend, one kind companion, one Ruth to comfort you ; then try to be thankful. When the sharp cutting winds of winter come, it is folly to be wishfully looking round upon the flowers that are swept off. We should rather let our eyes rest with thankfulness on the few sweet ones that remain. And so, too, we should dwell more upon the blessings which are still spared to us, than upon those which our heavenly Father has seen fit to take from us. Let us cherish them as His precious gifts, and use them to His glory.

CHAPTER VI.

THE STRANGER IN THE HARVEST FIELD.

RUTH ii. 2—14. And Ruth the Moabitess said unto Naomi, Let me now go to the field, and glean ears of corn after him, in whose sight I shall find grace. And she said unto her, Go, my daughter.

And she went, and came, and gleaned in the field after the reapers : and her hap was to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz, who was of the kindred of Elimelech.

And behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem, and said unto the reapers, The Lord be with you: and they answered him, The Lord bless thee.

Then said Boaz unto his servant that was set over the reapers, Whose damsel is this ?

And the servant that was set over the reapers answered 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.

Then said Boaz unto Ruth, Hearest thou not, my daughter ? Go not to glean in another field, neither go from hence, but abide here fast by my maidens :

Let thine eyes be on the field that they do reap and go thou after them : have I not charged the young men, that they shall not touch thee ? and when thou art athirst, go unto the vessels, and drink of that which the young men have drawn.

Then she fell on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, and said unto him, Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldest take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger ?

And Boaz answered and said unto her, It has fully been shewed me, all that thou hast done unto thy mother-in-law since the death of thine husband : and how thou hast left thy father and thy mother, and the land of thy nativity, and art come unto a people which thou knewest not heretofore.

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.

Then she said, Let me find favour in thy sight, my lord; for thou hast comforted me, and for that thou hast spoken friendly unto thine handmaid, though I be not like unto one of thine handmaidens.

And Boaz said unto her, At mealtime come thou hither, and eat of the bread, and dip thy morsel in the vinegar. And she sat beside the reapers: and he reached her parched corn, and she did eat, and was sufficed, and left.

SOME days had now elapsed, since the two widows had arrived in the city of Bethlehem. We have seen that Naomi's worldly condition was very different from what it was fifteen or twenty years before. She and her husband were then well off; now she was in a state of actual poverty. It was true, she had some relations at Bethlehem, who had it in their power to assist her; but she seems to have

felt too much honest pride to throw herself on their charity. She, no doubt, often opened her heart to Ruth on this subject. It must have been a matter of no small anxiety to them both, how they might maintain themselves ; and her daughter-in-law was as anxious as she was to use every exertion for their support.

You remember that when they first arrived in the land of Judæa, it was “the beginning of barley harvest.” and now all hands were busy in gathering it in.

Now, there was a wealthy man living in the town of Bethlehem, who farmed a tract of land in the neighbourhood. His name was Boaz ; and he seems to have been a man of a kind heart, and of a religious spirit. It was

probably his daily custom to go into his fields, and encourage his labourers, by speaking kindly to them, and showing that he took an interest in their work.

On one of these harvest mornings, Boaz comes into the field as usual. There is something in his words, which at once stamps him as a man of God. And there is something too in the manner of his men, which shows that they loved and respected him. He goes up to the reapers, and greets them with these goodly words, "The Lord be with you;" and they answered him, "The Lord bless thee."

This was just as it should be. And would it not be well, if this pious and kindly feeling existed more among us? Would it not be well, if employers felt

towards their servants, and servants towards their employers, just as Boaz and his men felt towards each other? Here was nothing of that free and easy manner, which seems to forget that God would have us honour our superiors; but there was a respectful courtesy and affection, which ought to exist between us. Boaz did not forget that his harvesters were men like himself, depending upon God's blessing: neither did they forget that he was their superior and their master.

True religion moulds a man's whole character and manner. It leads him to behave rightly in every condition of life. It makes kind masters and faithful servants. It produces love and harmony among persons of all ranks. And whilst it teaches the rich to be humble,

it teaches also the poor to be gentle and respectful. Its motto is, "Honour all men, love the brotherhood."

There must have been some cheerful hearts in that harvest field, where all felt that they had to do with so kind a master. The work was not done grudgingly by them; "not with eye service, as men-pleasers, but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; with good will doing service, as to the Lord and not to men." There was no working hard just when the master's eye was upon them, and then idling when his back was turned. No, they felt their labour was a pleasure; and when their employer came among them, they were glad to see him, and his presence cheered them in their toil.

“The Lord be with you,” “The Lord bless thee ;” these were the words that passed. Ah, how often are those words uttered, when we mean but little by them ! When we part with a friend we love, what can we wish him better, than that the Lord should be with him in all his ways, and bless him in all his undertakings ? How much is contained in these few short words ! Here is a wish for his body, and for his soul ; a wish that reaches through his present life into that which is eternal. Let us never utter this wish lightly ; but let it come from our hearts, and spring from a warm religious feeling within us.

Boaz was well acquainted with his poorer neighbours ; and as his eye rested upon them in the field, he had

old scripture custom, appointed by God out of compassion to the poor and friendless.

Now, it would appear that Ruth, being one of these friendless ones, had come forth from the city of Bethlehem to gather a few ears of corn, to support herself and her mother. And hearing what a kind and benevolent character Boaz bore in the neighbourhood, she had strayed into his fields for that purpose.

And observe, how kindly he speaks to her; "Go not," he says, "to glean in another field, neither go from hence, but abide here fast by my maidens. Let thine eyes be on the field that they do reap, and go thou after them. Have I not charged the young men that they should not touch thee?"

This was kindness that she had no reason to expect from him. Why should he thus look upon a poor solitary stranger? “Then she fell on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, and said unto him, Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldest take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger?” The answer of Boaz shows that he was well acquainted with her history, and with her exemplary conduct to Naomi, and the great sacrifice she had made in leaving her own country. And it shows too that he felt a pleasure in assisting her for the Lord’s sake. “And Boaz answered and said unto her, It hath fully been showed me all that thou hast done unto thy mother-in-law, since the death of thy husband; and how thou hast

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left thy father, and thy mother, and the land of thy nativity, and art come unto a people which thou knowest not heretofore. 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."

Boaz knew how to value her character. Her affectionate attachment to Naomi had struck him; and her decided conduct in being willing to leave her home and her friends, that she might spend the remainder of her days with Naomi and her people.

As a *kind* man, he much valued her conduct towards her poor afflicted mother. And as a *religious* man, he rejoiced that she was willing to leave her own people, and come over to the people of God. He felt thankful that

she, who was "once afar off," had been "brought nigh" to the God of Israel.

When he learnt therefore that this stranger was no other than the much talked of Ruth, he immediately began to feel a deep interest in her, and to show her marked kindness, desiring all in the field to treat her, not as a stranger, but as a friend.

Such is the interesting account given in this part of Ruth's history. And let us try and gather something from it. There are two chief lessons, which we may learn from it.

1. We see how God raises up friends for His people, if they really need them. When Joseph was sold as a slave to the Midianitish merchants, and was carried by them into Egypt, how forlorn w

his condition ! There he was, young and helpless, in a foreign land ! But God raised him up a helper : and Potiphar, the captain of the king's guard, befriended him.

In the days of Elijah too, when the Lord's prophets were persecuted by wicked King Ahab, and his servants, they found a friend in the king's household, Obadiah, who sheltered them from his master's wrath, and preserved their lives when they were in great danger.

Again, when St. Paul was sent as a prisoner to be tried at Rome for his life, the sadness of his voyage was greatly lessened by the kindness of Julius his keeper, who (we are told) " courteously entreated him," and showed him all the kindness that laid in his power.

And was it not so with Ruth, on her arrival at Bethlehem? God found her a valued friend in Boaz, a friend too just at the very time when she most needed one, in the hour of her deep distress. And so, it may be, He has dealt with some Reader of these pages. If you are poor, perhaps you could tell me how, when times were hard, and your store has dwindled away, and you knew not where to look for a supply, the Lord has sent you a friend in your distress. Or, in some sad and gloomy hour, when your heart has been ready to burst with inward grief, which has been long pent up within you, some kind christian friend has called upon you, into whose ear you made bold to pour all your troubles, and found unspeakable relief. Yes, so it is: God, who sometimes

takes away our dear friends, when we fancy we cannot do without them, loves also to supply them when it is really for our good. Oh, let us in both cases feel submission and thankfulness, and be ready to say, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord!"

2. We may learn too, from this part of Ruth's history, what a happy thing it is to put ourselves under the shelter of God's care.

Ruth, when she started from Moab with Naomi, had a sorrowful journey before her. And when they arrived at Bethlehem, melancholy indeed were their prospects. But God had good things in store for them. He was arranging everything for their coming happiness. When Ruth went out to

glean, we read that “her *hap* was to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz.” It *happened* so; but who brought it about? who ordered it? who guided her steps to that part of the barley-field? It was God, “under whose wings she had come to trust.” And if we are anxious to get happily through this world, and to be kept in safety, let us not seek to walk alone; but let us place ourselves in God’s hand, and keep close by His side. Let us pray, “Send out thy light and thy truth; let them lead me,”

“Guide me, O thou, great Jehovah,
Travelling through this wilderness.”

What a difference, to be fighting one’s way through this world, beset with dangers on every side, with no

helper, no guide, no comforter ; or to be walking peacefully and fearlessly, with God for our shelter—weak in ourselves, but strong in His great strength ; full of ignorance, but taught by a heavenly Teacher ; most unworthy and imperfect in ourselves, but covered with a Saviour's robe of righteousness !

Happy, happy, those who are thus dwelling “in the secret place of the Most High, and abiding under the shadow of the Almighty ;” who can say, “He is my refuge and my fortress ; my God, in Him will I trust.” He will lead you “by the right way,” till He brings you to that “city of habitation,” which He has prepared for you. He will “cover your head”
all times of danger, till you ar-

rive at length within that blessed
haven of rest, where you shall dwell
with Him for ever.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SUCCESSFUL GLEANER.

RUTH II. 15—23. And when she was risen up to glean, Boaz commanded his young men, saying, Let her glean even among the sheaves, and reproach her not.

And let fall some of the handfuls on purpose for her, and leave them that she may glean them, and rebuke her not.

So she gleaned in the field unto even, and beat out that she had gleaned : and it was about an ephah of barley.

And she took it up, and went into the city : and her mother-in-law said unto her, Where hast thou gleaned to-day ? and where wroughtest thou ? Blessed be he that did take knowledge of thee. And she showed her mother-in-law with whom she had

wrought, and said, the man's name with whom I wrought to-day, is Boaz.

And Naomi said unto her daughter-in-law, Blessed be he of the Lord, who hath not left off his kindness to the living, and to the dead. And Naomi said unto her, The man is near of kin unto us, one of our next kinsmen.

And Ruth the Moabite said, He said unto me also, Thou shalt keep fast by my young men, until they have ended all my harvest.

And Naomi said unto Ruth her daughter-in-law, It is good, my daughter, that thou go out with his maidens, that they meet thee not in any other field.

So she kept fast by the maidens of Boaz to glean, unto the end of barley-harvest, and of wheat-harvest; and dwelt with her mother-in-law.

I DARE say, you remember reading in the gospel, that one morning, when the disciples of our blessed Lord had been on the sea of Galilee all night, and had taken nothing, Jesus comes to them, and bids them let down their net in a particular spot: and imme-

diately they drew up an immense number of fish.

And does it not sometimes happen so with ourselves? Do we not often plan, and toil, and exert ourselves for hours and days together, and all to little purpose; and then suddenly perhaps, when we least expect it, we meet with success far beyond our hopes?

And not only is it so often in our worldly matters: it is so too with our spiritual concerns. We labour perhaps for peace in our souls; we seek it earnestly and anxiously, but seemingly all in vain. And then, at length, by some unexpected means, God gives us what we have so long been looking for; and after a long night of sorrow and toil, "joy cometh in the morning."

And why is this? It is because God

would have us know, that He alone gives the increase. He gives out of his fulness *when* and *how* He pleases.

Ruth might have gone into the harvest field of Boaz, and toiled for hours and days, and only gathered a few solitary ears of corn. But she went there looking for God's blessing, and depending upon God's bounty, and God was her Provider. He, who is the special Guardian of the poor and needy, put it into the heart of Boaz to befriend her.

We saw, in the last chapter, what unexpected favour he showed her. And we read, that not only did he give her permission to glean as much as she pleased in his field; but he charged his reapers to treat her well, and purposely to let drop a handful of corn

every now and then, that her gleaning might be the more successful. Never had she fallen in with any one who had shown her such singular kindness ; and he too a perfect stranger ! God had indeed raised her up a Friend, when she most needed one ; and supplied her with an abundance of food, when she least expected it.

Reader, think how good and gracious God is to us ; and that every friend we have is given to us by Him. He, in fact, is the Friend, and men are only instruments, whom He employs for dealing out His gifts.

Ruth had gone that morning into the corn-field, not knowing what treatment she might receive. But doubtless she had not forgotten *one thing*. Naomi had often taught her to be

“careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, to make her requests known unto God.” And most likely Ruth had before starting lifted up her heart to the Lord, and asked Him to prosper her. And as each handful was added to her store, she could not but feel thankful that God had heard her prayer.

Let me ask, What is *your* custom? Is it your custom to labour, depending upon your own exertions, and the success of your own cunning, or to labour in humble reliance upon God’s blessing? Is it your practice, *in times of great difficulty*, to go to God for wisdom to direct you? And is it your practice also, *in all the little matters of your daily life*, to commit your way unto the Lord?

Then you may expect, either to prosper, or, if not, to have the happiness of feeling that the Lord has in mercy withheld that which would have been to your hurt.

Ruth had left Bethlehem that morning with some little sinking of heart, but yet in full confidence that the Almighty's shield was over her. And in the evening she returned with a heavy load, but with a light heart. She is enabled to carry to her mother an ephah of barley—sufficient to relieve them from any anxiety for days to come.

And now, mark the thankfulness of them both. See how Naomi greets her daughter on her return home: “Where hast thou gleaned to-day? and where wroughtest thou? Blessed

be he that did take knowledge of thee.”

“And she shewed her mother-in-law with whom she had wrought, and said, The man’s name with whom I wrought to-day is Boaz. And Naomi said unto her daughter-in-law, Blessed be he of the Lord, who hath not left off his kindness to the living and to the dead.”

Alas, how often do we forget to be thankful! The very beasts of the earth read us a lesson: “The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master’s crib;” but man forgets to kiss the hand that feeds him. Like the nine unthankful lepers, he receives the gifts, but returns not to thank the gracious Giver. And yet what have we? Just so much as God measures out to us.

It would be well if the rich man would feel this. His purse may be full, and his larder well supplied, so that he has not a moment's anxiety about the morrow. But still let him remember that every mouthful he eats, and every morsel he has to spare, is just as much provided by God, as the manna and the quails were in the wilderness. It is true the manna and the quails came in a more marked way from God himself—they came by a miracle—but not a whit the less is the rich man's food provided by the Lord.

And it would be well if the poor man too felt this. He labours for his bread, for God hath so ordained it; but it all comes from His great storehouse; and He, as it were, keeps the key in his own hands, and gives as He

sees fit. He gives us our "meat in due season; He openeth his hand, and satisfieth the desire of every living thing."

Who is there, whose heart does not condemn him in this matter? We sit down to meal after meal with scarcely a feeling of gratitude or a word of thankfulness. Are there not some too, who sit down to meat without even asking a blessing upon it? And are there not others, who go through the form of saying a grace; but it is a mere form; the words are uttered, but they come from the lips only, and not from the heart.

But these bounties of God's providence are only a part of his mercies. There are ten thousand others, which should draw forth our affection. Oh,

that God would pour out upon us a greater spirit of thankfulness ! We have much indeed to be thankful for : grateful that we are spared whilst others are cut off ; grateful for health, for friends, for daily food ; and grateful too for innumerable spiritual blessings.

I remember once reading an account of a clergyman going into an hospital, and speaking to a poor man who was lying on one of the beds. He was a miserable object to the eye, worn out with pain, and gradually sinking under a slow, but sure, disease. And yet there was an expression of peace in his countenance ; and when the clergyman asked him, if he wanted anything, he replied, " I have all I need. Some would pity me, dying in this hospital ; but here I meet with every attention.

It is true my pains are very great, but so too are my consolations. I do want one thing, and but one—and that is *a more thankful heart.*”

And this is what *we* want—a more thankful heart. How much happier we should be, and how much more we should glorify God, if we had more of the spirit of praise. One half of the Psalms are psalms of praise. The angels in heaven praise God continually. The very birds sing in tones of thankfulness. But man, who has so much to be grateful for, whose cup runs over with daily blessings, man forgets to pour out his heart in words of thanksgiving to the Lord.

But let us now go back to Naomi and Ruth. We left them talking over

the events of the day, and the great goodness of God in so bountifully providing them with food for their present necessities. And now, Naomi makes a very important disclosure to Ruth. She tells her of a fact, which more than ever showed her that God had been the director of her steps that day. We all know how greatly the sons of Jacob were surprised, when Joseph informed them that he was their brother. And Ruth must have been not less astonished, when Naomi informs her that he, who had shewn her this unusual kindness, was her near kinsman !

Boaz had probably been quite ignorant of this, when he spoke so kindly to that poor gleaner in his field. His kind heart yearned towards her, be-

cause he pitied her condition as a stranger, and because he felt a deep interest in her story; and he knew something of that blessedness, of which our Saviour speaks, when he says, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

Yes, Boaz knew from his own experience the happiness of doing good to others. And it ought to be a cause of joy to us all, if we can, by any means, cheer a sad heart, or pluck out one sharp arrow from a wounded spirit. And who may not do this?

Go, my brother, if you are rich, and seek out those who are groaning under the hard pressure of want. By a little well-timed aid you may make some widow's heart leap for joy. God has been bountiful to you. He has given you enough, and to spare. Take a pleasure

in letting others share in your abundance. There are many objects for your charity ; many a Ruth on whom your kindness will be well bestowed. “ The liberal soul (says Solomon) shall be made fat : and he that watereth shall be watered also himself.”

And what if you are poor ? Because you possess little of this world's goods, can you do nothing for your brethren ? Yes, you can shew them some act of kindness. You can love them for your Master's sake. You can do them good. Go and try. Say to yourself, “ How can I be useful ?” Say to God, “ Lord, what wilt thou have me to do ?”

There are in the world, and perhaps very near you too, many weary souls that need a comforter. There are many broken hearts, which a word in

season might soothe. There are many straying sheep, who have no one to speak a kind word of counsel to them. There are hundreds—oh, think of this !—there are hundreds who never heard a Saviour's name, whom the glad tidings of the Gospel never reached, and in whose gloomy dwellings the sound of salvation never entered. A great portion of the world—more than one half of your fellow-creatures—are at this moment heathens, worshippers of false gods. I will not say, Go and teach them ; for this may not be your calling. But I do say this, Help to send out those, who are *able and willing to teach them* ; for “ how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard ? and how shall they hear with-

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out a preacher? and how shall they preach except they be sent?"

Thank God, there are ways enough, through which our love and kindness may flow out to our fellow-men. There is no lack of means, if we have only the will to use them. Boaz had a heart overflowing with kindness; and doubtless many ways were opened to him, by which that kindness might be shown. There was many a one like Ruth, who went away comforted from his presence.

Let us now, before we close this chapter, learn a lesson from Ruth's occupation in the field of Boaz.

Ruth was a gleaner; and so should we be. She came empty-handed to that field; but God sent her away full.

She searched, and she found. She picked up ear after ear, here a little and there a little, and so added it to her store. And is there not something better than corn, that *we* may glean? some field that affords better nourishment than the corn-field of Boaz? The Bible is that field. Search the Scriptures; glean there. Pick up every grain, for it contains precious nourishment. No matter how many gleaners; there is food enough for all. No matter how empty—the needier the better—for God “satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness.” Ah, you may have to toil for it, but not in vain; for “he that seeketh findeth.”

Alas, how many careless ones there are, who *never glean at all!* They

loiter all the day of their life idle. And so, when night comes, they sink into eternity with nothing done: no grace to support their souls has been gathered; nothing laid up for the world to come.

Others again *begin*, when Ruth left off, *at even*. All the bright and sunny portion of their lives they give to the world. And then, as evening closes in upon them, they begin to turn to their Bibles for consolation, which they cannot find elsewhere.

Ruth began gleaning in *the morning*. She felt that every hour must be employed; that every moment was precious. She laboured diligently "for the meat that perisheth." May we labour as earnestly for "that meat which endureth unto everlasting life!"

May we make God's word our daily study! May we prize every verse in it! May we never read it without asking for the Holy Spirit to teach us! That wondrous Book contains a remedy more valuable than gold, and more nourishing than wheat. Oh, why do we not look into it more closely, and read of Him, who says there, "I am the Bread of Life: he that cometh unto me shall never hunger?"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE HAPPY MARRIAGE.

RUTH iii. 1,—18; iv. 13—17. Then Naomi her mother-in-law said unto her, My daughter, shall I not seek rest for thee, that it may be well with thee?

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 lie, and thou shalt go in, and uncover his feet, and lay thee down; and he will tell thee what thou shalt do.

And she said unto her, All that thou sayest unto me, I will do.

And she went down unto the floor, and did according to all that her mother-in-law bade her.

And when Boaz had eaten and drunk, and his heart was merry, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of corn : and she came softly and uncovered his feet, and laid her down.

And it came to pass at midnight, that the man was afraid, and turned himself ; and behold, a woman lay at his feet.

And he said, Who art thou ? And she answered, I am Ruth thine handmaid ; spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid, for thou art a near kinsman.

And he said, Blessed be thou of the Lord, 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.

And now, my daughter, fear not, I will do to thee all that thou requirest ; for all the city of my people doth know, that thou art a virtuous woman.

And now it is true, that I am thy near kinsman ; howbeit there is a kinsman nearer than I.

Tarry this night, and it shall be in the morning that if he will perform unto thee the part of a kins-

man, well, let him do the kinsman's part: but if he will not do the part of a kinsman to thee, then will I do the part of a kinsman to thee, as the Lord liveth: lie down until the morning.

And she lay at his feet until the morning: and she rose up before one could know another. And he said, Let it not be known that a woman came to the floor.

Also, he said, Bring the vail that thou hast upon thee, and hold it. And when she held it, he measured six measures of barley, and laid it on her: and she went into the city.

And when she came to her mother-in-law she said, Who art thou, my daughter? And she told her all that the man had done to her.

And she said, These six measures of barley gave he me: for he said to me, Go not empty unto thy mother-in-law.

Then said she, Sit still, my daughter, until thou know how the matter will fall: for the man will not be in rest, until he have finished the thing this day.

So Boaz took Ruth, and she was his wife: and when he went in unto her, the Lord gave her conception, and she bare a son.

And the women said unto Naomi, Blessed be the

Lord which hath not left thee this day without a kinsman, that his name may be famous in Israel.

And he shall be unto thee a restorer of thy life, and a nourisher of thine old age ; for thy daughter-in-law which loveth thee, which is better to thee than seven sons, hath borne him.

And Naomi took the child, and laid it in her bosom, and became nurse unto it.

And the women her neighbours gave it name, saying, There is a son born unto Naomi, and they called his name Obed ; he is the father of Jesse, the father of David.

WE have seen that Ruth had now become acquainted with the fact, that her generous friend and protector was one of her nearest relatives—one of the few remaining kinsmen of her husband's family. This was an important discovery, on which her future welfare much depended : for Boaz, being himself unmarried, and she being now a widow, he was in a manner bound, according

to the Jewish law, to take her for his wife.

Boaz, it would seem, was not yet aware of this relationship. As yet he only knew Ruth as the Moabitish stranger, whose touching story, and spotless character, had completely won his heart.

She goes on gleaning in his field till the end of the barley and wheat harvest. And then Naomi proposes to her, that she should take an opportunity when Boaz was alone, to acquaint him with her relationship, and to ask him to claim her as his wife. The directions, which Naomi gave her to obtain this interview, appear to us very extraordinary, and also the conduct of Ruth on the occasion. Her character however stands too high for us to doubt

for a moment, that she was actuated by the best intentions. And Boaz was a man of such deep piety and upright feeling, that had he thought otherwise, he would have been the first to condemn her conduct.

In making known to him all the circumstances of her case, Ruth naturally felt timid and doubtful how she might be received. But he at once removes her fears; "And now, (he says,) my daughter, fear not; I will do to thee all that thou requirest, for all the city of my people doth know that thou art a virtuous woman."

Ruth had no dowry. She had nothing to recommend her to Boaz, but a blameless character. That was her dowry. He declares that at all hands she was acknowledged to be "a virtu-

ous woman." And for this single reason he was ready to agree with Solomon, that "her price was far above rubies."

Happy for us, if our life has been so consistent, that not a mouth is opened against us ; but all men speak of our virtue as a thing about which there is no dispute. Better to be poor and virtuous, than to have boundless wealth with a doubtful character. "A good name (says the Word of God) is rather to be chosen than riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold." Ruth found it so. She and Naomi had been for some time walking together in the path of peace. They had suffered much ; but all their sufferings had been working together for their good—their good in this world

and in the next. And most thoroughly could they feel that “godliness is profitable for all things, having the promise of the life *that now is*, and of that *which is to come*.” They had struggled through a long and dreary night of sorrow, and now the dawn of a new day of joy was breaking in upon them.

Whenever you are disposed, my dear Reader, to be cast down—when all around you, and within you, is wrapt in sadness—when you feel for the moment as though the hand of God was lifted up against you—when there is nothing earthly to cheer you, and no prospect of brighter days before you—then think of Ruth, and let her history comfort you. What could be more forlorn than her condition on that morning, when she slowly and

sadly walked through the streets of Bethlehem, on her way to the gleaning field? And yet, within a few days from that time, she was to become one of the happiest of women.

And so it oftentimes is. "Our extremity is God's opportunity." Our utter hopelessness is often the signal for God to stretch forth His arm of mercy. Think not then of the sorrow only which is pressing you so heavily; but lift up the eye of faith to Him, who can in one moment deliver you. And who knows, but that already deliverance may be actually on its way to you? "Light is sown for the righteous, and joyful gladness for such as are upright in heart." "To the upright there ariseth light in the darkness."

What an honour and happiness now

awaited this poor Moabitish widow ! She was to become the wife of a man, not only rich and esteemed, but of real piety. Such are the ways of God ! Sometimes He delights in humbling the proud, and at other times in honouring the lowly. “ The Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich ; he bringeth low, and lifteth up. He raiseth up the poor out of the dust.”

But there was one thing in the way of this happy marriage. When Ruth explained her relationship, Boaz at once recollected that there was a person, who was more nearly related to her than himself. “ It is true (he says) that I am thy near kinsman ; howbeit there is a kinsman nearer than I.” He proposes at once to bring the matter before him, and not to go one step

further without first obtaining his consent. He therefore desires Ruth to wait patiently, till all the difficulties should be fairly and openly met.

In a few days all is arranged. Every obstacle is removed. And Boaz is able to take Ruth as his lawful wife. It was indeed a happy marriage. We are not told so ; and yet we are sure it was.

What a bright prospect was before Ruth ! and what joy to gladden the latter days of her aged mother-in-law ! The name of “ Mara ” was no longer suited to her, for now indeed she might once more be called “ Naomi.”

Nothing more is told concerning Orpah—poor wavering, weak-hearted Orpah ! If all that had happened reached her ears, she could not but

have envied her sister's happiness. Perhaps many a time, since that bitter day of parting, she had thought within herself, My sister was right, and I was wrong. The Lord guided her choice—the world mine. And “she hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.”

How sure and bountiful are the payments of the Almighty! Who ever came under His wing in vain? Who ever lost anything by trusting in Him? Who ever forsook the Moab of this world for the true Israel, and had not cause to rejoice in the change? How wonderfully did God ordain it all! This heathen woman becomes a believer. This poor friendless stranger becomes the wife of a great man, and

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mistress of the very fields in which she was once a gleaner !

I said that Ruth's marriage was a happy one. And why ?

1. Because they could reckon on God's blessing; and doubtless both earnestly prayed for it. What we, all of us, want is God's blessing on our undertakings. Without it there may be much that promises fair, but there can be no real, solid happiness. But if God is with us, if He smiles upon our path, though that path may be among thorns and briars, yet there will be peace.

2. Again, we may be sure it was a happy marriage, for there was *a oneness of feeling* between Boaz and Ruth.

They both loved God. They were both journeying on one and the same road. They were partners for eternity. "Can two walk together (asks [the Apostle] except they be agreed?" And this is the advice he gives, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness, or what communion hath light with darkness?"

It matters little, whether earthly comforts be many or few; whether the store be scanty or abundant; whether the dwelling be large or lowly—if the hearts within it are bound together by that bond which is stronger even than the tie of affection—the bond of grace—then, be assured, there will be happiness.

I am very sure that it is not wealth

without, that gives peace within. We have heard of misery in a palace, and we have seen the truest joy in a cottage. If we want to find happiness, we must look for it in that dwelling where husband and wife feel alike, and think alike; where they are serving and loving the same Master, are fellow-travellers on the same road, and are hastening towards the same home.

We have somehow got into our heads that riches make us happy. But there is no greater mistake. If we are unhappy, we must look *within* for the reason. Depend upon it, the cause is there. It is true that outward trials may befall God's people; for "great are the afflictions" even "of the righteous." But still, if God is with us, all will be well. If our Saviour is by our

side, we are safe and happy. There was, no doubt, a time in Ruth's history, when many a tear trickled down her cheeks. But her sorrow was "turned into joy." And even amidst her sorrow there was a mixture of comfort. Just as we sometimes see, when the drops of rain are falling from the clouds, a gleam of sunshine rests upon them, and makes them glisten ; so Ruth had comfort in her gloomiest hours. And at length every cloud was swept away, and her soul was lit up with the brightest peace. Her married life was happy. She could say, "The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places." That God, who was her Guardian in the days of her trial, now watched over her with the same loving care.

Yes, Ruth must have been very

happy. And so was Boaz. And I would say to every married couple, If you want your partnership in life to be as happy, go and kneel down together before God, and ask that the same blessing which rested upon Boaz and Ruth, may rest upon you. Go together and make a solemn surrender of your hearts to God. Let it be your chief aim to be helpers to one another on the way to heaven. And thus, though each year brings you nearer to the day of parting, you will feel that it is also bringing you nearer to that most happy time, when you shall be once more together in the kingdom of your Lord.

The only thing that is further told us concerning Boaz and Ruth is that they had a son. And this too was an

additional joy to Naomi ; for she loved him, as though he had been her own grandchild ; and she became his nurse.

When this child was born, Ruth little thought what an honour belonged to him. This very son was to become the grandfather of David, and the forefather according to the flesh, of our blessed Lord.

God's promise to Abraham was, " In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." And therefore every Jewish mother felt that when a child was born to her, his might possibly be the family from which the Blessed One would spring.

And here we at once see a reason why this simple history of Boaz and Ruth should be given in the Bible. And think how God is pleased to use

the mean things of this world for His great purposes. Ruth was a very humble woman; once a heathen, but afterwards grafted into the family of Israel; once a gleaner in the fields of Boaz, but raised by the providence of God to be his wife; and then she gave birth to a son from whom the Saviour of the world descended.

How little do we know what God may be pleased to bring about by our means. There is one great chain, by which all the events of our lives are strung together; and each link, as it were, is fitted in by the hand of God. Many might have thought it was chance that led Ruth to accompany her mother to the city of Bethlehem; and that it was chance that guided her steps when there. But the Christian

will look deeper, and discover the gracious hand of God in all this—guiding, directing, ordering all for His own great ends.

And now, properly speaking, we have come to the close of Ruth's history. But I wish to say a little about what is related to us in the beginning of the fourth chapter; and this, will I trust, lead our thoughts to Him, who is the great Redeemer, the Restorer of our lost inheritance.

I hope that we may have already learnt something from this history. And as Ruth carried home to her mother what she had gleaned in the corn-field, may we have carried away something, and laid it up in store for our present comfort, and our everlasting profit !

CHAPTER IX.

THE FORFEITED INHERITANCE
REDEEMED.

RUTH iv. 1—12. Then went Boaz up to the gate, and sat him down there : and behold the kinsman of whom Boaz spake, came by ; unto whom he said, Ho, such a one, turn aside, sit down here. And he turned aside, and sat down.

And he took ten men of the elders of the city, and said, Sit ye down here. And they sat down.

And he said unto the kinsman, Naomi, that is come again out of the country of Moab, selleth a parcel of land which was our brother Elimelech's.

And I thought to advertise thee, saying, 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 besides 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 of 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, for I cannot redeem it.

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 neighbour : and this was a testimony in Israel.

Therefore the kinsman said unto Boaz, Buy it for thee : so he drew off his shoe.

And Boaz said unto the elders, and unto all the people, 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, the wife of Mahlon, 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.

And all the people that were in the gate, and the elders said, We are witnesses ; The Lord make the woman that is come into thine house, like Rachel and like Leah, which two did build the house of Israel ; and do worthily in Ephratah, and be famous in Bethlehem.

And let thy house be like the house of Pharez, (whom Tamar bare unto Judah,) of the seed which the Lord shall give thee of this young woman.

THE last chapter of the book of Ruth makes us acquainted with a curious custom which was formerly observed by the Jews.

It would seem that before Boaz could take Ruth for his wife, there were certain forms to go through, according to the Jewish law. He must first offer her to her nearest kinsman — that is, to the nearest kinsman of her late husband. And we have already seen that there was a person at Beth-

lehem, who was more nearly related to Elimelech's family than Boaz was. Again, there was a piece of land in the neighbourhood of Bethlehem, which Elimelech had probably mortgaged when he left Judæa at the time of the famine. The right of recovering it again belonged to Naomi and Ruth; but they were too poor to buy it back. This piece of ground therefore must also be offered to the next kinsman. In fact, (according to the practice of the country) whoever bought this plot of ground must also marry Ruth.

Let us turn to the law, as it stands in the twenty-fifth chapter of Deuteronomy. We read in the fifth verse, "If brethren dwell together, and one of them die, and have no child, the wife of the dead shall not marry with-

out unto a stranger: her husband's brother shall go in unto her, and take her to him to wife, and perform the duty of an husband's brother unto her. And it shall be, that the firstborn which she beareth shall succeed in the name of his brother which is dead, that the name be not put out of Israel. And 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."

There is a plain reason why this rule was ordained by God. The Jews were a peculiar and distinct people ; and it was desirable that the different tribes should be kept entirely separate from one another. It was therefore necessary for that people that they should marry their relations instead of strangers.

Now, see how strictly Boaz acts up to this law. We read, in the first verse, "Then Boaz went up to the gate, and set him down there." The gate of the city

was always the place where the public courts were held. And Boaz, being himself one of the elders, or aldermen of the city, he goes there. "And, behold, the kinsman of whom Boaz spake came by; unto whom he said, Ho, such a one! turn aside, and sit down here. And he turned aside, and sat down." We may suppose, of course, that Boaz knew his name, and called him by it; though it is not mentioned here. "And he took ten men of the elders of the city; and he said, Sit ye down here, and they sat down." It seems that it was not a regular court day; but he summons ten of the elders to meet him in the town-hall, on purpose to transact this business. He begins immediately to open the proceedings. "And he said unto the kinsman, Naomi, that is come again out of the country of Moab,

selleth a parcel of land which was our brother's Elimelech's. And I thought to advertise thee, saying, 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."

Thus he gives him full legal notice, that he may have the refusal of it. All was open and above ground, for Boaz was a man of the strictest justice and integrity. The kinsman seemed at first anxious to redeem the land, until he was told that, if he did so, he must also marry this widow. But upon this he refused. He liked the land well enough; and perhaps caught at it all

the more greedily, because, as these poor women were obliged to sell it, he might get so much the better bargain. "I will redeem it," said he. "Then said Boaz, What day thou buyest the field of the hand of Naomi, thou must buy it also of 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 for myself, lest I mar mine own inheritance: redeem thou my right to thyself; for I cannot redeem it."

Perhaps he thought it would be a disgrace to him to marry such a poor widow, who was come from a strange country, and almost lived upon alms. He feared it would be a blemish to his family; it would mar (or injure) his inheritance." So he at once yields up his right, and hands it over to Boaz.

How many act like this man in spiritual things! They think well of God's service. They believe there are blessings and riches to be found in it. But they are not willing to espouse religion with all its duties, and take it "for better, for worse." They will not be bound with it; and so they give it up, for fear of "marring their inheritance," and losing some worldly advantage. Like Esau, they prefer a mess of pottage to a glorious birth-right.

The right of redemption is now fully made over to Boaz. And observe, how the curious custom, mentioned in Deuteronomy, is carried out in this instance, (verse 7,) "Now this was the manner in former times in Israel, concerning redeeming and concerning changing, for to confirm all things :

man plucked off his shoe and gave it to his neighbour, and this was a testimony in Israel. Therefore the kinsman said unto Boaz, Buy it for thee. So he drew off his shoe."

The handing over the shoe was an emblem of giving the right over to Boaz; just as it is sometimes the custom with us, in the sale of a house, to give over the key into the hand of the lawful purchaser, to show that we give up all right of possession.

Such was the transaction—curious enough in itself, but something more than curious, if we try to get a spiritual meaning from it. Indeed, in the whole of Ruth's history there is probably some deep and hidden truth, which does not at first sight meet the eye. Let us see what we may learn from it.

In the first place Ruth was once *ignorant of God*. She knew no more than the rest of the people of Moab. She was a blind heathen, a worshipper of false gods. And surely, *in our natural state*, we are but little better. Our eyes are blinded. Our mind is darkened. We are separated from God. We know Him not. Probably there is not one who reads this, who would kneel down and worship a wooden or stone idol. But are there not many who have no spiritual acquaintance with God as their Father, who are utterly ignorant of Christ as their Saviour, who never pray, who never lift up their hearts to the God of Israel? Ah, I hesitate not to say, that unless God opens our eyes we cannot know Him; and unless He touches our hearts, we cannot love

Him. We can have no affection for Christ, unless grace draws us to Him. Such is our sad state by nature—"without God in the world."

Again, there was a time when Ruth not only *lived* in the land of Moab, but *her heart was there*. She loved the people of Moab, with all their sins, and all their idolatry. And do not those, whose hearts are unchanged by grace, cling to the Moab around them? See how they revel in its follies, and how greedy they are after its pleasures; for they have never tasted of any better.

There is not only a Moab around us, but there is a Moab within us. We have the world in our hearts; and it is hard, very hard, to part with it. But, believe me, the world must be driven

out of us, and God must take undivided possession of our hearts, before we can really delight in His service.

Thirdly, Ruth was at one time very *forlorn and helpless*. She was a poor friendless stranger, in actual want, far from her home, and without any power to help herself. What a picture of our condition by nature! We are needy, helpless, destitute, afar off from God. Every man who has not found a Saviour is in this state, and would remain so if left to himself. Reader, where should *we* have been, if no pitying eye from heaven had looked upon us—if no word of mercy had reached our ears? And where are we *now*, if God's grace has not lifted us out of that pit, into which we have all fallen? Happy those who

can say, “ I *was* a child of wrath ; but through grace I have obtained mercy. I *was* afar off ; but I have been brought nigh by the blood of Christ.”

But, fourthly, we have plain proof that Ruth was *a changed person*.³ So changed was she, that when her wayward sister left Naomi, and clung to her false gods, she set her face boldly towards the land of Israel, and journeyed on with her pious mother-in-law. Let me just ask, what are your feelings about [that “ better country,” which God points out for your dwelling-place ? Do you believe [the report you hear of it ? Do you long [to get there ? Have you set out on your homeward journey ? Are [you willing to have, as your fellow-travellers on the road, many a poor despised one, whom

the world scorns? Are you prepared to be looked coldly upon? Are you willing to cast in your lot for time and eternity with the people of God? Then, like Ruth, you have chosen well; and your portion is a happy one.

Fifthly, we see that Ruth at length found *a friend*—the best friend she had ever known. Boaz knew all her history; he pitied her; he loved her; and at length he married her. He was not only a kind friend to her, but a rich and powerful one. Such is Jesus, our Friend above. His power is almighty, and His love passing knowledge. He is both able and willing to bless us. He looked upon us in our lost condition, and His heart yearned towards us. “When we were yet without strength,

in due time Christ died for the ungodly." Greater love hath no man than this. He calls us, "not servants, but friends." He is the Bridegroom of His church; and as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so does He rejoice over His people.

We have been speaking, in this chapter, of Boaz redeeming the lost inheritance of Elimelech. But a greater Redeemer, a greater than Boaz, is here. We have lost our inheritance. We have forfeited all. We have sold ourselves for nought. But He has redeemed us without money. He has bought back heaven for us. We lost it in Adam, but we may recover it in Christ.

Boaz was kind to Ruth, and recovered her lost inheritance. But remember, in doing it, he shed no

precious blood. He gave not "his back to the smiters." He bore no cross, and endured no agony. Neither had Ruth ever offended him. She had never spoken one unkind word against him, nor had an ungrateful feeling towards him ever passed through her mind. Oh, how different is it with our Redeemer! He died for sinners—for the ungodly—for those who showed him no love! He came from heaven to save us. And in order to do this he ventured *the marring of his own inheritance*; for "though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor." He is now stretching out His hands towards us, who have served other masters, who have loved the world and sin, instead of loving Him.

Yes, he invites us at this very

moment to come under His shelter. What amazing love ! What kindness of heart ! Will you not be won by it ? Oh, what folly, what sin, what madness, to let such boundless mercy pass by us unheeded, and not to open the door of our hearts to receive this loving Saviour !

And now, my dear Reader, we have gone through Ruth's history together. I hope you have been interested in it. But I hope for something more than that—I hope that you have been led to pray, that you may follow Ruth, as she followed the Lord. God grant, that as she looked up to Boaz as her earthly deliverer, her friend in the hour of need, and the redeemer of her worldly inheritance,—so you may look up to

Jesus, who is your Brother, your Friend, your Husband, your Lord ! Endeavour to give Him the best affections of your heart. And ever remembering that you are “not your own,” but “bought with a price,” seek to “glorify Him in your body, and in your spirit, which are His !”

THE END.

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