

THE  
PULPIT COMMENTARY,

EDITED BY THE  
VERY REV. H. D. M. SPENCE, D.D.,  
DEAN OF GLOUCESTER;

AND BY THE  
REV. JOSEPH S. EXELL, M.A.

---

R U T H.

*Exposition and Homiletics*  
BY REV. JAMES MORISON, D.D.,  
AUTHOR OF 'COMMENTARY ON THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. MATTHEW,' *ETC.*

*Homilies by Various Authors:*  
REV. W. M. STATHAM; REV. PROF. J. R. THOMSON, M.A.

*NEW EDITION.*

FUNK & WAGNALLS COMPANY  
LONDON AND NEW YORK

1906

# THE BOOK OF RUTH.

---

## INTRODUCTION.

---

### § 1. THE STORY.

SOME time during that period of chequered Hebrew history when the Judges ruled, a famine prevailed over the whole land. There was "cleanness of teeth" everywhere. Even the most fertile districts, such as that of which Bethlehem (the house of bread) is the centre, suffered severely. Among the sufferers were a respectable family, consisting of Elimelech, a proprietor in the locality, his wife Naomi, and their two sons, Machlon and Chilion. This family, being hard pressed by the *Hungersnoth*, resolved to emigrate for a season to the adjoining country of Moab, where apparently there was exemption from the widespread agricultural calamity. Accordingly, setting out from the place of their nativity, they reached the place of their destination, and were, it would appear, hospitably welcomed by the inhabitants (ch. i. 1, 2).

Unhappily, however, Elimelech, subject it would seem to some constitutional weakness, was prematurely cut off (ver. 3).

After his decease his two sons married Moabitish wives, called respectively Orpah and Ruth, and all seemed to go well for a season. There was, however, no family, no mirth of little ones, in either home. And in the course of some ten years from their entrance into the land of Moab, both Machlon and Chilion, in consequence apparently of delicacy inherited from their father, sickened and died (vers. 4, 5).

The three widows were left behind, desolate and destitute. The mother-in-law, Naomi, did not see how she could live in comfort, or maintain herself in respectability, in a foreign land. Still less could she see how it would be possible for her to stand between her daughters-in-law and want. Hence she resolved to return to Bethlehem. Her sorrowing daughters-in-law made up their minds to accompany her (vers. 6, 7).

Naomi, however, felt that it would be too great a burden of responsibility

for her to undertake to make her daughters-in-law comfortable in Bethlehem. Hence, after allowing them to give her a convoy for some distance, she insisted that they should return to their mothers' homes, warmly expressing her prayer and her hope that they might soon have sweet and restful homes of their own (vers. 8—13).

The thought of leaving their esteemed and beloved mother-in-law was like a barbed arrow in the heart of both Orpah and Ruth. But at length, after much pleading and remonstrance, Orpah yielded, and returned to her mother (ver. 14). Ruth, however, would not give one moment's entertainment to the proposal. How could she allow the beloved old lady to pursue in solitude her weary way homeward? How could she brook the thought of leaving her to live in solitude after the old home should be reached? Her mind was made up firmly and inflexibly to accompany her much-loved mother-in-law as her companion and attendant. All the nobler feelings of her soul rose, as she thought of her duty, into a heroic mood, while a spirit of deep poetical pathos seized her utterances, as, in unconscious rhythm, she said—

"Insist not on me forsaking thee,  
 To return from following thee :  
 For whither thou goest, I will go ;  
 And wheresoever thou lodgest, I will lodge :  
 Thy people is my people,  
 And thy God my God :  
 Wheresoever thou diest, I will die,  
 And there will I be buried.  
 So may Yahveh do to me,  
 And still more,  
 If ought but death part thee and me" (vers. 15—17).

Naomi could insist no more ; and the two widows consequently, with their hearts knit together for ever, wended their weary way toward Bethlehem, which at length they reached. On entering the city gate, travel-worn, and sore, and creeping along the streets in quest of some humble lodging, Naomi was recognised, and soon there was quite a commotion among the matrons and others who had known her of old. The news of her arrival, in the company of an interesting and pensive-looking young woman, flew from house to house, till wondering groups of excited females gathered in the streets, and exclaimed to one another, *Is THAT NAOMI?* The name *Naomi*, which brought up to the mind the idea of the *sweetness of Jah*, suggested for the moment a painful contrast to the sorely-disheartened widow. And hence, in her anguish, she begged the people not to call her *Naomi*, as of old, but *Mara*, inasmuch as the Lord had been dealing very *bitterly* with her (vers. 18—21).

It was fortunately just at the commencement of the barley-harvest that Naomi and Ruth arrived in Bethlehem (ver. 22). Hunger was imminent. Perhaps it had already seized on the two widows, gnawingly. Hence, without delay, Ruth begged permission from her mother-in-law to go out in quest of gleanings. It was humiliating employment, but honest. The permission asked

was granted. And so Ruth went out of the house, passed out of the city gate, and, casting her eyes over the wide expanse of golden fields, right and left, ripe for the sickle, and already alive with reapers and binders and gleaners, she was inwardly guided to a field that belonged to Boaz, a substantial yeoman, and, as it happened, near of kin to the late Elimelech. Ruth knew nothing of his near relationship, but courteously requested from the overseer permission to glean (ch. ii. 1—7). The overseer, perceiving that there was about this petitioner a certain air of superiority that he had never before witnessed in gleaners, got from her some particulars of her history, and made her heartily welcome to take her place on the field (ver. 7). So she went to work “with a will.”

By and by, as the dayspring advanced in the sky, the proprietor himself, Boaz, came out of the city to see how his reapers were getting on with their pleasant work. As he reached them and passed along, he courteously saluted them all—*Yahveh be with you!* The grave, kindly courtesy was heartily reciprocated by the workers—*May Yahveh bless thee!* (ver. 4).

His eye speedily caught sight of the elegant and diligent gleaner, and so he directed his steps to the overseer, and asked, *Whose is this young woman?* (ver. 5). The overseer informed him, and praised her modesty and industry. Boaz, passing back again along the row of workers, enjoined on the young men to be respectful to the stranger. Then he went direct toward her, and, addressing her as a father might speak to his daughter, he made her most heartily welcome to continue in his fields as long as the harvest continued (ver. 8). He informed her that he had given strict injunctions to the young men to refrain from all improper freedoms; and he graciously added that she was to avail herself at will of the water which was drawn for the workers, and carried into the field (vers. 4—9).

Ruth was filled with wonder and gratitude for such unexpected favours, and bowed herself in obeisance to the ground (ver. 10).

Boaz was stricken with admiration, and informed her that he had got, with much satisfaction, full particulars of her devoted attention to her mother-in-law. He prayed that she might receive abundant recompense from Yahveh the God of Israel, under the shadow of whose outstretched wings she had come to trust (vers. 11, 12).

As Boaz was about to turn away to attend to his affairs, Ruth ventured, with beautiful respectfulness, to solicit a continuance for the future of that graciousness which he had already showed to her, and which had brought comfort to her heart (ver. 13).

Then they separated. But, at the time of the mid-day siesta and refreshment, Boaz returned to her, and conducted her to the booth, under whose cooling shade all the workers were wont to assemble at mid-day. He requested her to be seated beside the reapers, and to partake of the bread and vinegar which had been provided. He likewise prepared for her a bunch of delicious “parched corn,” of

which she gratefully partook, reserving, after she was satisfied, a portion for her mother-in-law to give her a glad surprise (ver. 14).

After the siesta was completed, and Ruth had returned to her labour, Boaz told the reapers to let her glean "even among the sheaves." And not only so, he wished them now and again to pull stalks out of the bundles, with express design, and leave them lying about, that she might gather them. They were, moreover, to be most particular not to affront her by any unkind insinuation (vers. 15, 16).

The work went on merrily till near sunset, when Ruth, collecting together her gatherings, and threshing them, found that she had about an ephah of barley (ver. 17). She took up the welcome load, and made for her humble home, where she had a long story to tell, and many a long story to hear, regarding Boaz (vers. 18—22).

All the harvest through, Ruth continued to glean in the fields of Boaz (ver. 23). But after the reaping and gleaning were ended, and there were no more out-of-door engagements, and no more interviews day after day with Boaz, such a change came over her tender and desolate spirit that the keen eye of her mother-in-law saw that some other step required to be taken. She had had, apparently, interviews with Boaz, and clearly perceived that a mutual attachment had sprung up; but for some reason or other a seal was on his lips. To remove that seal Naomi contrived a plan, which would have been in the highest degree improper had there not been, on the one hand, a peculiar Oriental custom in vogue, and, on the other, absolute reason for absolute confidence in the incorruptible purity of both Boaz and Ruth. The plan was for Ruth to take the position allowed her by the Levirate law. That would at once put Boaz on his honour in reference to the deceased Machlon and the living widow (ch. iii. 1—4). Ruth yielded to her mother-in-law's wishes, and the plan was carried into effect (vers. 5—7). Ruth placed herself by night at the feet of her kinsman while he slept, and, when discovered, was not only heartily welcomed, but warmly commended, and thanked. He was indeed advanced in years, and he could not, for that reason, have ventured to offer himself for her acceptance. But since his age was not to her an obstacle, and she wished to show every possible respect to the deceased, it would be his joy to mingle his lot with hers (vers. 8—11).

There was, however, one obstacle in the way. There was an individual who was nearer of kin than himself to the deceased. According to the Levirate law, that individual had a prior claim on all the prerogatives attaching to priority of kinship; and with these prerogatives were bound up the duties of the nearest of kin. He consequently must, first of all, receive full consideration; and if he insisted on performing the kinsman's part, why then the matter would pass out of the sphere of personal preference, and the result would be accepted as the outcome of the Will that is higher than man's. But if that

nearest kinsman should have no desire to act the kinsman's part, then with joy would Boaz step into his place, and show respect to the deceased (vers. 12, 13).

The watches of the night passed rapidly on, no doubt amid many mutual consultations and explanations. And just as the first thinning of the darkness into dusk gave augury of the coming morning, Ruth rose to return home. She bore a present with her, which would carry its own tangible meaning to Naomi. By and by home would be reached, and Naomi saluted her daughter-in-law by saying, with a peculiar interrogative significance, *Who art thou?* After the whole story was told, "Sit still, my daughter," said Naomi, "until thou know how the matter will end, for the man will not rest until this very day he have brought the affair to its consummation" (vers. 14—18).

It was as Naomi conjectured. Early in the morning Boaz took his place at the gate of the city, and made arrangements for transacting important business in the presence of elders and other witnesses. The near kinsman was passing by. Boaz requested him to be seated, as he had some business to discharge in which they both were interested. The kinsman complied with the respectful request, and ere long a full court of casual witnesses assembled. In the presence and hearing of these elders and others Boaz informed his friend that Naomi, who had lately returned from Moab, had determined, in consequence of reduced circumstances, to sell the property that had belonged to her deceased husband Elimelech (ch. iv. 1—3). He added, "Buy it before the inhabitants of the city, and the elders of the people, if thou art willing to act the kinsman's part." The kinsman intimated that he was willing (ver. 4). Boaz then added that the property would require to be purchased from the hand, not of Naomi only, but of Ruth likewise, the prospective heiress, *who, moreover, was to go with it as a fixed appurtenant*, "in order that the name of her deceased husband might be raised up on his inheritance" (ver. 5).

The anonymous kinsman, however, was not willing to acquire the estate on the terms offered (ver. 6). Hence, perceiving that Boaz was quite willing, he resigned his right in his favour, and pulling off his shoe, handed it to his friend (vers. 7, 8). All the people were witnesses that the nearest kinsman had voluntarily surrendered his peculiar prerogative.

The story thenceforward hastens to its conclusion. Boaz, in presence of the people, acquired the estate, and along with it Ruth, its living and priceless appurtenant (vers. 9, 10). "We are witnesses," shouted the assembled conclave, and then they lifted up their voices and prayed that showers of blessings might descend on the bridal pair (vers. 11, 12). Ruth thus became the wife of Boaz, and bore him a son, whom the matrons who clustered around insisted on calling *Obed*. Naomi took the child to her bosom, and nursed it with tenderness and care which no other care and tenderness could surpass. He was (1) the lineal descendant of Judah, the head of the royal tribe, and (2) the lineal ancestor of David (vers. 13—22).

Taking a broad survey of the contents of the little Book, we may say that it consists of a series of pen-and-ink pictures, or idylls in prose, representing, firstly, the remarkable attachment of a young Moabitish woman, herself a widow, to Naomi, her desolate Hebrew mother-in-law; and, secondly, the remarkable reward with which, in God's providence, her self-sacrifice was crowned.

## § 2. AIM OF THE WRITER.

Edward Topsell, one of the Puritan commentators on the Book, gave, as the leading title of his exposition, 'THE REWARD OF RELIGION,' in that way indicating what he supposed to have been the aim of the writer.

The title is not entirely satisfactory, for certainly it is not the *religion* or *religiousness* of Ruth that is the principal feature of character portrayed in the Book. There is not, it is true, the least shadow of reason for casting the least shadow of suspicion on the genuine piety of the heroine of the story. There is no room for taking exception to her theology. There is still less, if that be possible, for raising objections to her sweet and simple religiousness. Though probably no skilful theologian, she had come to Bethlehem-Judah, to put her trust "under the wings of the God of Israel" (ch. ii. 12). She believed that He "is," and that He is "the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him" (Heb. xi. 6).

Still it is not Ruth's religiousness that is the outstanding feature of the character that is delineated in the Book. It is not her love to the great Divine Object, the God of Israel, that is portrayed. It is her love to a good and worthy human object, Naomi, her mother-in-law. Topsell was right in assigning to *religion* or *religiousness* a higher pedestal than can be accorded to any other devotedness; but he misled himself when, in his eagerness to do homage to that which is highest, he assumed that it was the highest ideal of human character that is bodied forth in the succession of literary photographs which are found in the Book of Ruth.

Many have supposed that the true *raison d'être* of the Book is a matter of genealogy. The ground on which this opinion is maintained is the fact that there is a little bit of genealogy in the five verses with which the Book is wound up. This bit of genealogy connects Pharez the son of Judah with David the son of Jesse. The line passed through Boaz, the husband of Ruth. It is an important historical relationship, more especially to us Christians; for as Christ was "the Son of David," he was the Son of Boaz too, and consequently the Son of Ruth the Moabitess—a Gentile link. The fact is all the more significant and suggestive as, in ascending the genealogical ladder upward to Abraham, the father of the Messianic people, we discover that there were other Gentile links which connected the favoured descendants of the patriarch with the outlying "families of the earth," and which likewise show, in consequence of the moral peculiarity attaching to them, how wondrous was the boon conferred upon men,

when the Lord of glory humbled himself to become the "kinsman" and the "friend" of those whose name is "sinners."

But in the genealogy that is appended to the Book of Ruth, the succession is carried no further down than to King David. The genealogy is thus, so far as the discoverable aim of the genealogist is concerned, rather Davidic than Messianic. The interest in it that was manifestly felt by the writer, and that may have been extensively felt by his cotemporaries, was an interest that gathered round "great David" himself, rather than "great David's greater Son."

Yet it seems preposterous to assume that the whole graphic story of Ruth was composed simply in consequence of this genealogical interest. The assumption looks like an inversion of the natural, and the substitution in its place of the unnatural.

Why not rather suppose that the writer wrote just because he was charmed with the facts of Ruth's character, and because he rejoiced over the reward with which, in the providence of God, the heroine's devotedness was so signally crowned? Why not accept the narrative of the Book as being simply what it appears to be? Why not suppose that the writer may have simply sought to reproduce, in the literature of words, the delineation of character and reward that had already been so charmingly executed in the literature of facts? Why hesitate to assume that he may have undertaken his task in the spirit of literary spontaneity, feeling a wide sympathy in his heart, seeing a meaning in everything, and resting assured that there must be a very peculiar meaning and lesson in all those things that are the outcome of noble effort, noble endurance, and noble love.

The writer must, we conceive, have been, though perhaps unconsciously, and in a comparatively limited sphere of activity, a *true litterateur*. He loved literature for its own sake, and had a true appreciation of its mission and responsibilities. Hence, though a Hebrew, he did not turn aside his eyes and his heart from beholding and admiring facts full of interest, and instruction, because they occurred in connection with an alien race. Nor did he make apologies for finding excellences in Gentiles, and recording them with vivid zest and delight. There is a noteworthy absence of Hebrew bigotry in the spirit of the Book.

The title which is given to his commentary on the book by Richard Bernard, another of the Puritan expositors, brings out admirably what appears to have been the aim of the Hebrew writer—"RUTH'S RECOMPENSE."

### § 3. THE BOOK'S LITERARY CHARACTER.

The Book of Ruth is not a history; nor is it a biography. It is only a little biographical episode in a history. It is a *story*; but, without doubt, a *true story*.



True? How is that evinced? What is there even to suggest the story's objective truthfulness or authenticity?

Much. The Book comes before us as a narrative of facts; and, although making no parade of its veracity, it has, in its own inimitable simplicity and crystalline transparency, all the appearance of being an honest representation of objective realities.

The material of the story, moreover, is of such a nature that its unreality, if it had not been honest, would at once have been detected and exposed. The stuff out of which the story is woven consisted, so to speak, of very sensitive filaments. It had to do with the genealogy of the royal family. The principal personages in the story were the ancestors of King David.

That there was a Moabitish link in the chain of his genealogy must have been well known to the king himself, and to all his household, and to a large proportion of the people of Israel in general. It must likewise have been well known that this Moabitish link did not lie far back in the line. The existence of such a link was too great a peculiarity to be treated with indifference. We cannot doubt that the whole history of the case would be a frequent topic of narration, conversation, and comment at once within and around the royal court. The probability, therefore, is, that the writer would be careful to do no violence to the facts of the case. Any alloy of fiction or romance on such a subject would have been at once resented, alike by the royal family and by the great body of the people, the devoted admirers of the king.

It is, hence, one should suppose, in a mood of literary waywardness that Bertholdt contends that the Book is *not* a narrative of facts, but merely a "historical fiction"—a family picture painted on a canvas of romance.\* The writer, he alleges, has himself betrayed the fact of his work's fictitiousness. "He forgot himself for once," he says.† For although, according to one part of his story, he represents Naomi, with her husband and sons, as reduced to such extremity of poverty that they required to abandon their mortgaged property and take refuge in Moab; yet, in utter forgetfulness of this representation, he introduces Naomi, at a later stage of the story, as saying to the matrons in Bethlehem that "she went out *full*, and came back empty." A mere romance writer, Bertholdt alleges, might easily run into such a contradiction, and care nothing about it; but a narrator of actual facts would speedily have detected the blunder, and have got it rectified. The blunder! It is demonstrably Bertholdt's own. He has, in fact, committed a double blunder. (1) He has misunderstood what is said of the condition of the family before their departure, and (2) he has likewise misapprehended what Naomi said after her return. The family is not represented as reduced to absolute destitution before their emigration; there was abundance of scope for much further descent. And, on the other hand, there is not an

\* Section 551 of the 'Einleitung' is entitled "Das Buch enthält reine Dichtung."

† "Der Verfasser hat sich einmal vergessen."

atom of evidence to establish the objector's conjecture, that, when Naomi after her return referred to her 'fulness' before her departure, she had simply her financial condition in view.

#### § 4. DATE OF COMPOSITION.

There is not the least likelihood that the little Book could have been written just immediately after the occurrence of the events narrated. For, in the first place, the writer, in the very opening sentence of the Book, comes down beyond the age of the Judges. He speaks of what came to pass "in the days when the Judges judged." It is implied that these days were, by his time, at some considerable distance in the past. Then, in the second place, he speaks in ch. iv. of a custom that "in former time" obtained in Israel in reference to important transactions, involving the transfer of property, or the surrender of property-rights, which custom was observed by Boaz and his kinsman. At the time when the writer lived the custom had become obsolete, so that a considerable period must have elapsed between the date of the events narrated and the date of the narrative of them in the Book of Ruth. Then, in the third place, the genealogy at the close of the Book is carried down to David, and thus far beyond the time "when the Judges judged."

It might be said indeed that the genealogical appendix may have been added by a later hand. True; *it may*. And if it should ever be proved that it has been, then all the logical effects involved in the proof will be willingly conceded. Until, however, the desiderated proof be forthcoming, we may be excused for accepting the Book in its integrity.

No opinion, on the whole, wears a greater aspect of verisimilitude than that which assigns the composition of the Book to the reign of King David. That epoch was among the Hebrews a literary age. The king himself was a man of letters. He would draw literary men around his throne. He was a man, besides, of deep human sympathies; and thus he would no doubt be intensely interested in the Moabitish incident. He would be master of all its details. They had come down to him only through a very limited succession of remembrancers. "Boaz begat Obed; Obed begat Jesse; and Jesse begat David." No wonder that even the conversations and the salient sayings of Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz should have been sharply imprinted on the brief succession of memories.

King David, moreover, was free from many narrownesses of spirit that belittle multitudes of other minds. He recognised the gracious relationship of the God of Israel to all the families of the earth. He believed that there was a tide of goodness and tender mercy flowing from the inexhaustible depths of the Divine heart to all nations and peoples, even to the uttermost parts of the earth. Hence he would not be ashamed of the Moabitish link in his genealogy. He would be proud of it, and all the more, it is likely, because at a

peculiarly critical period of his own history he had been on terms of amity, intimacy, and confidence with the cotemporary king of Moab. At the time when he had to flee for his life from the presence of Saul, and take refuge in the cave of Adullam, it is said, in 1 Sam. xxii. 3, 4, that he went to Mizpeh of Moab, "and said unto the king of Moab, Let my father and my mother, I pray thee, come forth, and be with you, till I know what God will do for me. And he brought them before the king of Moab: and they dwelt with him all the while that David was in the hold." It would not be doing violence to verisimilitude were we to suppose that, in David's communication with the king of Moab, he made mention of the Moabitish link in his genealogy, and of the incidents connected with it. If Ruth, an ancestor of his own, had been hospitably received in Judah, would it be asking too much if the grandson of that ancestor might, with his wife, be hospitably received for a season in Moab?

No other time, it would appear, can be fixed upon as furnishing a more likely date for the composition and publication of the Book.

Not an earlier time; for the custom of pulling off a shoe and giving it to the contracting party was observed in the days of Boaz, but had gone into desuetude at the date of the Book's publication. It could scarcely have died out much sooner than in two or three generations.

Not a later time; for the minute incidents recorded, and the minute conversations and observations reported—all of them apparently unfictitious—would, if unpublished, have faded from the memories of the personages principally concerned. Then the genealogy, at the close of the fourth chapter, *is carried down to King David, and stops there*. Why should it stop there, and by stopping at that particular stage suggest and indicate a particular date? Had the writer some political object in view that required a false date to be given to his publication? There is no trace of such a *motif*. Had he some distinctively theocratic object in view that could be best subserved in his judgment by indicating a false date? There is no evidence of such a *motif*. Had he then some literary object in view that might be furthered by a fabrication, in the colophon, of the date of composition? There is not the slightest evidence of the presence in his mind of such a *motif*.

Ewald, indeed, and Bertheau, following other critics of earlier date, and having themselves many followers of later date, conjecture that the Book is not nearly so old. They would ascribe it to the exilic epoch. Bertholdt asks if it should not be ascribed to the post-exilic epoch.\* This, their conjecture of postponement to a date far removed from the time of King David, is based for the most part on considerations that have to do generically with a large proportion of the Old Testament writings. It is hence a question which, falling to be discussed on its own wide arena, is, to a large extent, ruled out of this specific Introduction.

\* "Ob es vielleicht gar in die Zeiten nach dem Exil gehört." § 553.

The specific reasons that are adduced in favour of the application of the postponing theory to the particular Book of Ruth are not to us of much or very weighty significance. One is that there are some coincidences of expression discoverable in Ruth, on the one hand, and in the Books of 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings on the other. These coincidences, it is contended, are evidences that the writer of the Book of Ruth must have been acquainted with the Books of Samuel and Kings. For instance, it is said in Ruth i. 17, "May Yahveh do so to me, and more also, if," &c.; and the same formula is found in 1 Sam. iii. 17; 1 Kings ii. 23; xx. 10; 2 Kings vi. 31. Again, it is said in Ruth i. 19, "the whole city got into commotion;" and the same expression occurs in 1 Kings i. 45, where it is rendered in King James's version, "the city rang again." Then in Ruth iv. 4 we read, "I will uncover thine ear" (so as to give thee information); and in 1 Sam. xxii. 8, and elsewhere, it is written, "There is none that uncovereth mine ear" (to inform me). Ewald thinks that "we distinctly hear an echo from the Book of Job, not merely in the general style, but even in some single words and phrases" ('Geschichte,' vol. i. p. 155). He instances Job xxvii. 2, where the simple name "(the) Almighty" is used instead of the complex name "God Almighty" (see Gen. xvii. 1, &c.). Ewald thinks that this shorter form of the name "was evidently rendered possible" in Ruth i. 20 "only through the grand example of the Book of Job." He would infer, therefore, on the one hand, that the writer of the Book of Ruth was familiar with the Book of Job, and he assumes, on the other, that the Book of Job belongs to a late period of literary activity. With the assumption we have here nothing to do. But his inference in reference to the age of the Book of Ruth, and the concurrent inference that is deduced by the advocates in general of exilic or post-exilic origination, from those coincidences of expression of which we have made mention, are surely extremely precarious, or rather absolutely baseless. The simple name "(the) Almighty" occurs not only again and again in Job, but likewise in Gen. xlix. 25, and also in Num. xxiv. 4, 16. If the writer of the story of Ruth must needs be held as borrowing, why might he not have borrowed from Genesis and Numbers in place of Job. And is not the whole argument reversible? Why not infer from coincidences of expression that the writers of the Books of Samuel and Kings borrowed from the Book of Ruth? And, besides, what is to hinder us from supposing that all of the expressions specified lived and moved and had their being for generations as part and parcel of the common idioms of the country, so that various writers of various ages might at pleasure make use of them as constituent elements of the unappropriated language of the people? Peculiar expressions, like peculiar single words, have their lifetime in a people's language. They are born, they grow, they culminate, they wane, grow old, drop off, and are buried. Why might not all the expressions referred to by the critics of the Book of Ruth be "living" at all the successive epochs doing which the writers themselves

were living, from whose writings the coincident words and phrases have been culled?

Ewald thought that he detected evidence of late exilic composition not merely in the echoes of earlier books, but likewise in the "antiquarian lore" that is characteristic of the writer. He refers in particular to the statement that is made in the fourth chapter, in reference to the antique custom of taking off a shoe, and presenting it to the contracting party, when rights of property were surrendered (see ver. 7). He thought, moreover, that such a custom, unearthed by successful antiquarian research, "could only have ceased with the national existence" ('Geschichte,' *ut sup.*). The argument is thus twofold. 1. One branch of it consists in the evidence of successful antiquarian research. 2. Another resolves itself into the peculiarity of the custom itself. It was of such a nature, and manifestly so tenacious of life, that it could not have come to an end so long as the national existence continued.

But surely both of these branches of argumentation are insufficient to carry much weight, or even any weight at all. One might know that a peculiar custom once prevailed, and yet be undistinguished for extensive and accurate "antiquarian lore." The word-of-mouth tradition that sufficed to convey to the writer of the Book of Ruth the actions, and conversations, and remarks of Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz respectively, would likewise suffice to be the vehicle of information regarding the old-fashioned symbolism that was observed when certain legal rights were readjusted. And is it not a matter of well-known fact that legal symbolisms, connected with the transfer of rights of property, *have changed* in various nations whose national existence remains intact? In some nations, for instance, the delivery of land symbolically by the delivery of earth and stones of the land, or other representative elements, though not so very long ago a binding formality, has now ceased to be imperative, or even customary. If there is to be evidence of the exilic or post-exilic composition of the Book of Ruth, it must be found elsewhere.

Some have supposed that this evidence is found in several Chaldaisms of expression. In ch. i. 13, 20; ii. 8, 9, 21; iii. 3, 4; iv. 7, there are certainly some peculiar forms of words. Sanctius supposed that they might be Moabitisms. Dereser conjectured that they might be Bethlehemitish provincialisms. They remind one undoubtedly of forms that are common in Chaldee. But it is at the same time to be borne in mind that there were no hard and fast lines separating, in the olden times, between the various members of the Semitic group of languages. They overlapped one another in various details; and as originally the fathers of the affiliated nations literally lived in one home, so, even after long periods of distinctive linguistic evolution, there were floating about, in waving lines of mutual intercourse, expressions that were in some cases survivals of original unity, and in others the direct result of subsequent familiar contact. One thing is evident, that the Hebrew which is found in the Books

of the Bible, even the oldest of them, is comparatively modern. It is the survival of a much older Hebrew. The manifold verbal abbreviations are evidence (see Raabe's 'Zurückführung des Hebräischen Textes des Buches Ruth auf die ursprünglichen Wortformen'). And nothing is more evident than that the expressions in ch. ii. 8, 9, 21; iii. 3, 4, called Chaldaisms, and not improperly so called, are in reality Hebrew archaisms.

We see then no reason whatever for postponing the date of the Book of Ruth to exilic or post-exilic times. All the weightiest evidence seems to be in the scale that assigns the composition of the Book to the literary age of King David. And yet, even with these strong convictions, we would bear in mind that the real interest of the story is independent of any chronological theory. The Book is a literary gem in ancient Hebrew literature; and it speaks, by what Ewald calls "the pre-eminent beauty of its pictures and descriptions," not to the hearts of Hebrews only, but to universal man.

### § 5. THE AUTHOR.

The authorship is utterly unknown, and guesses need not be multiplied. Many attribute it to Samuel. Abarbanel ascribes it to the writer of Joshua. Others have imagined that Hezekiah, and others still that Ezra, is the author. Heumann thinks that King David himself was the penman. He conceives that any other writer would, in the genealogical table at the close, have given its royal honour to his name. It is too slender and too precarious a basis on which to establish his guess. It is in vain to guess, although we deem it probable that the incidents of the story would be preserved with interest in the family of David, and often narrated within the precincts of his home.

### § 6. THE BOOK'S PLACE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT CANON.

Editors of the Old Testament Canon have freely availed themselves of their right to hold their own opinions, and to act upon them. The Hebrew editors have relegated the little Book of Ruth to the 'Hagiographa,' the group of 'Sacred Miscellanies,' which comprehends, among other works, the Psalms, the Proverbs, Job, the Song of Songs, Lamentations, and Ecclesiastes. In the Hebrew Bibles in current use Ruth stands between the Song of Songs and Lamentations, as if with sorrow on the left hand, and joy on the right. In other editions it stands at the head of the entire group. In the Septuagint, on the other hand, followed by the Vulgate, the Book is found at the close of the Book of Judges, as if it were a little biographical additament to that larger historical work. Origen expressly says that the Hebrews—he must mean the Hellenistic Hebrews—count Judges and Ruth as forming one book.\* Luther followed in the wake of the Vulgate, and so did Bishop Miles Coverdale and the

\* See Eusebius's 'Ecclesiastical History,' vi. 25.

authors of King James's English version. Hence the Book's position in our English Bibles. We may doubtless assume that Josephus attached the Book to Judges as one parcel, as did Origen's Jews, for we could not otherwise make out his enumeration when, in his 'Cont. Apion.,' i. 8, he says that the Hebrew sacred writings consisted of twenty-two books.

### § 7. STYLE OF COMPOSITION.

There is no artistic elaboration in the style. There is not a vestige of aim at fine writing. No whip is laid on the imagination to impart gleam or lustre to what is said. Yet there are in the Book graces of diction that are the native and apparently unconscious outcome of ardent and devoted attachment on the one hand, and of kindly feeling and admiration on the other. The composition is simple, clear, transparent, and with quite a noticeable amount of that additive or aggregative and agglutinative method of joining thing to thing, that is a feature of Hebrew composition in general. There are eighty-five verses in the Book, and yet there are only eight of them that do not commence with the conjunction *and*. Throughout the little Book this earliest of conjunctions occurs about 250 times in all.

### § 8. LITERATURE.

Passing over those expositions of the Book of Ruth which form part and parcel of serial commentaries on the whole, or on certain great sections, of the Bible, it will suffice, for our purpose, to take note almost exclusively of such exegetical, homiletical, and critical works as are monographs, constituting a specialist literature on Ruth.

The annotations of Victorinus Strigel, 1571, and Feuardentius, 1582, are only of antiquarian interest. So, too, are the homilies of Rudolph Gualter, John Wolph, and Ludowick Lavater, who all flourished in the second half of the sixteenth century. All three were famous in their day for Latin sermons, and were, to a remarkable degree, prolific in that kind of literature. Lavater's book on Ruth, for example, contained "homilias xxviii.," and it had, as companion volumes, one on Joshua containing lxxiii. homilies, one on Judges containing cvii., one on Ezra containing xxxviii., one on Nehemiah containing lviii., one on Esther containing xlvii., and one on Job—enough to try a little his readers' "patience"—containing cxli. He was fortunate in finding, for his sermons on Ruth, an English translator of the name of E. Pagett, who published his version in the year 1586.

To these homilies may be added Alexander Manerba's volume, published in Venice, and entitled, '*Peregrinatio Ruth Moabitidis per Commentarium et Sermones descripta*,' 1604; as also Didacus de Celada's '*Commentarii literales et morales in Rutham*,' with a twofold appendix, '*de Boozi convivio mystico*,

id est, Eucharistico, et de Maria virgine, in Ruth figurata,' 1614. Schleupner's little 'Explicatio,' 1632, need not be overlooked.

To English students the works of Edward Topsell, Richard Bernard, and Dr. Thomas Fuller, all of the seventeenth century, will afford more interest. The first and second are conspicuous for conscientious and earnest elaboration, the third for a delightful might, mastery, and sparkle of thought. Topsell's volume is entitled, 'The Reward of Religion, delivered in sundrie Lectures upon the Booke of Ruth, wherein the godly may see their daily both inward and outward trialls, with the presence of God to assist them, and his mercies to recompense them,' 1613. The author, 'in his 'Epistle Dedicatorie,' speaks humbly of his "slender studies, which are but as smoak, being compared with the burning coales of others' knowledge." There are certainly but few scintillations in the work. Richard Bernard's work, a quarto, is entitled, 'Ruth's Recompense; or, a Commentarie upon the Book of Ruth, wherein is showed her happy calling out of her owne country and people, into the fellowship and society of the Lord's inheritance, her virtuous life and holy carriage amongst them, and then her reward in God's mercy. Delivered in several Sermons, the brief sum whereof is now published for the benefit of the Church of God, 1628. Elaborately earnest, and earnestly elaborate, like Topsell's volume, but with more mental grasp in it; albeit, like Topsell's, of scarcely any *exegetical* value. Bernard, unlike Topsell, could emit flashes, and he did emit many of them. But there is often something lurid in them, as when he takes occasion to strike out against "the roaring boys and damned crew"—"the tobacconists, the drunkards, the riotous," who "congee and compliment, or hunt and hawk, and then curse and swear as the furies of hell" (ch. ii. 17). Dr. Thomas Fuller's 'Comment on Ruth,' 1650, unfortunately breaks off at the end of the second chapter. It bears evidence of having been hastily thrown off, but nevertheless it is aglow with wit and bright felicities of illustration and practical application. The commentaries of both Bernard and Fuller were republished in 1865 by James Nichol of Edinburgh.

A different style of book altogether is John Drusius's 'Historia Ruth, ex Ebræo Latine conversa, et commentario explicata. Ejusdem Historiæ Tralatio Græca ad exemplar Complutense, et notæ in eandem,' 1632. The dedication to Archbishop Whitgift is dated Lambeth, 1584. This thin quarto is a gem in its way, so far as the sphere of grammar is concerned. Drusius said of himself, "I am no theologian, and I am not sure whether I am capable of sustaining the character of a grammarian; but," adds he, "I am a Christian."

An invaluable book to the student is John Benedict Carpzov's 'Collegium Rabbini-biblicum in libellum Ruth,' 1703, published in Leipzig. It contains, on verse after verse—(1) the Chaldee Targum of Jonathan, in the original, and translated into Latin; (2) the notes of the lesser and larger Masora, with translations and explanatory annotations; (3) the expositions of the great Hebrew



commentators Rashi and Ibn Esra, as also of Ibn Melech and others, all in the original, and translated into Latin; and then (4) Carpzov's own elaborate exposition, in which he discusses the views of preceding expositors and critics. The author belonged to a literary family. He himself was John Benedict Carpzov the Second. The latter part of the work was compiled from the author's classroom notes by John Benedict Carpzov the Third, father of John Benedict Carpzov the Fourth, the famous Helmstädt professor of poetry and Greek, who wrote 'Theological and Critical Strictures on the Epistle to the Romans,' and 'Sacred Exercitations on the Epistle to the Hebrews, out of Philo of Alexandria.' The great scholar, Gottlob Carpzov—greater than all the Benedicts—was cousin to John Benedict the Third.

Perhaps the best of all helps for such as have just begun to study Hebrew is Werner's '*Liber Ruth illustratus, duplici quidem interpretatione, quarum altera verba sacra in fonte exhibita de verbo ad verbum exprimit, altera secundum idiotismos linguæ sanctæ,*' &c., 1740. The book is full of sound, old-fashioned scholarship.

To the same eighteenth century belongs C. A. Heumann's '*Spicilegium ad Historiam Ruth,*' 1722—1725. It was published in three successive parts of his '*Pœcile,*' vol. i. pp. 177—187, 353—376; vol. ii. pp. 153—170. Heumann was a Free Lance, and of great capacity; but he was too hasty, too self-assertatory and self-assured, too fond of differing, and too little aware that there is a moral element in literary taste.

Toward the beginning of the same eighteenth century, in 1711, Outhof's '*Exposition of the Book of Ruth,*' in Dutch, was published. It was much prized by his own countrymen for its profusion of erudition. Toward the end of the century, in 1781, John Macgowan's '*Discourses on Ruth, and other important subjects, wherein the wonders of Providence, the riches of grace, the privileges of believers, and the contrition of sinners are judiciously and faithfully exemplified and improved,*' was published. The author, says Mr. Spurgeon, "is well known for originality and force." "The discourses," he adds, "are good reading."

Coming down to the nineteenth century, there is quite a considerable group of practical and homiletical works, such as Lawson's '*Lectures on the whole Book of Ruth,*' 1805; Hughes' '*Ruth and her Kindred,*' 1839; Macartney's '*Observations on Ruth,*' 1842; Dr. Stephen Tyng's '*Rich Kinsman, or the History of Ruth,*' 1856; Aubrey Price's '*Six Lectures on the Book of Ruth,*' 1869; B. Philpot's '*Ruth—Six Lectures,*' 1872; Bishop Oxenden's '*Story of Ruth,*' 1873; and W. Braden's '*Beautiful Gleaner,*' 1874. The oldest of these, viz., Dr. George Lawson's *Lectures*, is as fresh as the latest. The excellent author had the pen of a ready writer, and, guiding that pen, a large endowment of sanctified common sense. Two other recent works fall to be added to the same group, only the publishing firms from which they are issued desire them, for other than

literary reasons and purposes, to be *dateless*. They are, firstly, Samuel Cox's 'Book of Ruth, a Popular Exposition,' and Dr. Andrew Thomson's 'Home Life in Ancient Palestine, or Studies in the Book of Ruth,' both of them fresh and charming little volumes.

A very different and much more scholarly group of works consists of such as the following:—Dereser's 'Büchlein Ruth, ein Gemälde häuslicher Tugenden. Aus dem Hebräischen übersetzt, erklärt, und für Pfarrer auf dem Lande bearbeitet,' 1806; Riegler's 'Das Buch Ruth. Aus dem Hebräischen ins Deutsche übersetzt, mit einer vollständigen Einleitung, philologischen und exegetischen Erläuterungen,' 1812; Mezger's 'Liber Ruth ex Hebræo in Lat. versus perpetuae interpretatione illustratus,' 1856. To these may be added 'Ruth ein Familien-gemälde,' in Augusti's 'Memorabilien des Orients,' pp. 65—96, 1802; and Umbreit's 'Ueber Geist und Zweck des Buchs Ruth,' in the 'Studien und Kritiken' of 1834. In this group of works Riegler's volume, in particular, is conspicuous for its taste. The author had a good ear for detecting and appreciating the rhythmic element in the style of the ancient story, and in this respect he anticipated the judgment of Ewald, who takes special note of the rhythmic elevation of the composition in ch. i. 20, 21 for example ('Geschichte,' vol. i. p. 154, Eng. trans.).

To this group of expositions we may add, as deserving of special notice for the interpretation of Ruth, Bertheau's Commentary in the 'Kurzgefasstes exegetisches Handbuch zum Alten Testament,' and the Commentary of Cassel, as contained in Lange's 'Bibelwerk.' The former appeared in 1845; the latter in 1865. An excellent English translation of the latter, with valuable notes, by P. H. Steenstra, appeared in New York in 1872, as part and parcel of the English reproduction of Lange's 'Bibelwerk.'

A very important appendix to the more critical expositions of the Book of Ruth consists of—(1) Charles H. H. Wright's 'Book of Ruth in Hebrew, with a critically-revised Text, various readings, &c., including a grammatical and critical Commentary; to which is appended the Chaldee Targum, with various readings, grammatical notes, and a Chaldee Glossary,' 1864. — (2) Raabe's 'Das Buch Ruth und das Hohe Lied im urtext nach neuester Kenntniss der Sprache behandelt, übersetzt, mit Anmerkungen und einem Glossar versehen,' 1879. The former of these two works will be of the utmost value to young students of Hebrew, as an assistant and guide. The latter is of high philological significance, resting as it does on the most recent lines of linguistic science.

---

#### ARRANGEMENT OF THE BOOK IN SECTIONS.

For the purposes of this Commentary the following arrangement into sections has been adopted:—

Section 1 (ch. i. 1—5). A certain Hebrew family, driven by stress of famine, emigrated from Bethlehem to Moab, where still greater trials befell them.

Section 2 (ch. i. 6—14). The widowed mother of the family, Naomi, resolved to return to Bethlehem.

Section 3 (ch. i. 15—22). Ruth, her Moabitish daughter-in-law, attaches herself indissolubly to Naomi; and the two widows, sadly reduced in circumstances, journey on foot to Bethlehem, which they reach at the commencement of the barley-harvest.

Section 4 (ch. ii. 1—9). Ruth obtains permission from her mother-in-law to go out in quest of gleanings, and lighted on the fields of Boaz, a kinsman of her late husband. Boaz met her in the rear of his reapers, and took an instant interest in her.

Section 5 (ch. ii. 10—17). Ruth, profoundly affected by the kindness of Boaz, received from him still greater attention and kindness, and gathered during the day about an ephah of barley.

Section 6 (ch. ii. 18—23). In the evening she returned with her precious load to her mother-in-law, who informed her of the kinship of Boaz, and poured out her heart in thanksgivings to God.

Section 7 (ch. iii. 1—18). At the close of the harvest, Naomi, having watched the growth of an attachment between Boaz and Ruth, adopted the principle of the Levirate law to effect their complete union in heart and hand, and thus to secure a "rest" for her devoted daughter-in-law. The scheme was in all respects successful, and most agreeable to Boaz.

Section 8 (ch. iv. 1—12). As there were, however, some technical obstacles in the way of the union, Boaz took steps to have these honourably surmounted in the presence of the elders of the city, and he succeeded.

Section 9 (ch. iv. 13—22). The bridal of Boaz and Ruth was consummated, and Obed was born, the lineal descendant of Judah, and the grandfather of King David.

# THE BOOK OF RUTH.

## EXPOSITION.

### CHAPTER I. 1—5.

Ver. 1.—Now it came to pass. Or, more literally, "And it came to pass." The "And" is somewhat remarkable, standing at the commencement of the Book. But as it is also found at the commencement of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 2 Chronicles, Ezekiel, Esther, and Ezra, its use, though inartistic, must be amenable to some literary law. The Books specified, even including Ezekiel, are historical. They are parcels of history, each narrating events that had their genesis in more or less significant antecedent occurrences. This historical genesis, so very different from an "absolute commencement" of things, is indicated, though probably in unreflective spontaneity, by the copulative "And." **In the days when the judges ruled.** Or, more literally, "when the judges judged." In primitive times there was no function that was more important for society than that of judiciously settling disputes between man and man. Every such settlement, besides conferring a benefit on society, and in particular on the individuals at variance, would increase the moral influence and social elevation of the judge. By and by his moral and social superiority would, in favourable circumstances, grow into authority, specifically judicial on the one hand, and generically political, or semi-political, on the other. When military prowess and skill in strategy were added, a ruler, champion, or leader would be the result. Many such leaders rose up among the Hebrews ere yet society was compactly organised. They were variously endowed; but most of them were only very partially equipped for the judicious administration of the affairs of the commonwealth. All, however, were called *judges*;

RUTH.

and the discharge of their high duties was denominated *judging*, even when it was entirely inconspicuous as regards judicial ability or judicious determinations. The Hebrew word for *judge* is שופט *shofet*; and it is an interesting evidence of the very close kinship of Hebrew and Phœnician, that in Carthage the chief magistrate, as we learn from Livy and other Roman writers, was called *sufes* (originally, as we see from the inflection, *sufet*). **That there was a famine.** An admirable though free rendering. In the original the structure of the whole statement is exceedingly primitive and "agglutinative"—*And (it) was in the days of the judging of the judges, and (there) was a famine. In the land.* Namely, of Israel. The non-specification of the particular country referred to is evidence that the writer was living in it, as one at home. Josephus says that it was under the judgeship of Eli, the high priest, that the famine spoken of occurred ('Antiquities,' v. 9, 1). But here the historian speaks "without book," and without any particular plausibility. Several expositors, such as Bishop Patrick, have antedated, by a very long way, the calculation of Josephus. They would assign the famine to the period when the Midianites and Amalekites came up, "as grasshoppers for multitude, to destroy the land," so that Israel was greatly impoverished (see Judges vi.). But it is in vain to multiply guesses. The date of the famine is not given, and it is futile to make inquiry for it. **And a certain man.** The interpolation of the individualising word "certain" is quite uncalled for, and now quite archaic. The simplicity of the original is sufficient, "And a man." **Of Bethlehem-judah.** Or, as it might be still more literally represented, "of Bethlehem, Judah." There is no such single name as Bethlehem-judah.

There is only the apposition, for discrimination's sake, of one geographical name to another, just as we may say, in English, *Boston, Lincolnshire, or Alexandria, Dumbartonshire*. The localisation of the main name is thus effectually indicated. There is another Alexandria in Egypt; there is another Boston in the United States of America; and there was in Palestine another Bethlehem, namely, in the canton of Zebulun (see Josh. xix. 15). Bethlehem, Judah, lies about six miles to the south of Jerusalem. "Its appearance," says Dr. Porter, "is striking. It is situated on a narrow ridge, which projects eastward from the central mountain range, and breaks down in abrupt terraced slopes to deep valleys on the north, east, and south. The terraces, admirably kept, and covered with rows of olives, intermixed with the fig and the vine, sweep in graceful curves round the ridge, regular as stairs" ('Syria and Palestine,' p. 199). The valleys below are exceptionally fertile, and have been so from time immemorial. Hence indeed the name *Beth-lehem*, or *Bread-house*. Its modern name is *Beit-lahm*, or *Flesh-house*. **Went to sojourn in the land of Moab.** We have no word in English that exactly corresponds to the verb *שָׁבַע* rendered *sojourn*. The cognate noun is uniformly translated, in King James's version, *stranger*, and means *foreigner*. The verb means to *dwell as a foreigner*, but its root-idea is yet undetermined. The Latin *peregrinari* admirably corresponds. The man of Bethlehem, Judah, went forth from his own country to "peregrinate" (Greek, *παροικῆσαι*) "in the land of Moab;" literally, "in the fields of Moab," that is, "in the pastoral parts of the territory of Moab." It was not a very great way off, this land of his "peregrination." Its blue mountains, rising up luridly beyond the silver thread of the Jordan and the gleaming expanse of the Dead Sea, are distinctly visible from the Mount of Olives and the heights about Bethlehem. **He, and his wife, and his two sons.** The resumptive *he* is employed for the purpose of linking on to him, in his "peregrination," the other members of the little household. He emigrated "along with his wife and two sons." He had fought hard to keep the wolf of hunger from his door, but was like to be beaten. One after another the props of his hope that better days would soon dawn had been swept from under him, and he saw no alternative but to leave for a season the land of his fathers.

Ver. 2.—**And the name of the man was Elimelech.** That is, "God is King," not, as the older critics were accustomed to interpret it, "My God is King." The intermediate *is* is not the possessive pronoun,

but the vowel of union. The name would be originally significant of strong religious sentiments, perhaps mingled with strong political principles. The imposition of it on a son would be something like a manifesto of the father's creed. **And the name of his wife Naomi.** Or rather "No-o-mi." The precise import of the word is not absolutely ascertained; but it is probable that it is somewhat abbreviated in its termination, and means "God is sweet," or, very literally, "Jah is sweetness." It had been originally imposed as a name by some grateful and happy mother, who, by gracious providences, or by other gracious revelations, had been led to think that "sweet are the ways, sweet are the dealings, and sweet is the character of God." The word does not mean *beautiful*, as some suppose; nor *gracious*, as others suppose; nor *my delight*, as others still suppose. It was not intended to describe the character of the person who was to bear the name. It was intended to signalise, in the spirit of a manifesto, a much-prized feature in the Divine character—that feature, namely, that is displayed when "he deals sweetly with men." Gesenius is doubtless right when he makes *sweetness* the fundamental idea of the whole group of affiliated words (see his 'Thesaurus,' *in voc.*). The cognate Hebrew adjective is rendered *sweet* in 2 Sam. xxiii. 1 and Prov. xxiii. 8 (comp. Prov. xvi. 24 and the margin of 2 Sam. i. 23). In the light of this interpretation, and of it alone, can the full significance of what Naomi said on her return to Bethlehem be apprehended: "Call me not *Naomi*, call me *Mara*: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me" (ver. 20). **And the name of his two sons.** In our idiom we should say, "and the names of his two sons." The two sons, however, were for the moment regarded as a unity among the other units of the household. **Mahlon**, or rather "Machlon," and **Chilion**. We need not dip deeply into the etymological import of these names, or attach to them, as applied to Elimelech's children, any peculiar significance. The names, unlike those of the parents, are devoid of theological tinge, and, in these modern times at all events, their import is liable to endless debate. One would at the first blush of consideration suppose that the one meant *sickness*, and the other *consumptiveness*, or *consumption*—rather uninteresting and melancholy ideas. But they are peculiarly confounding when we consider that the individuals, so named in our story, had apparently inherited a delicate constitution, which developed in both of them into premature *sickness* and *decay*. The names have the aspect of being prophetic. And yet, even though we should assume that Elimelech, in virtue of some

element of bodily delicacy, was afflicted with feelings of morbid despondency, it is hard to come to the conclusion that he would deliberately stereotype his most hypochondriacal anticipations in the names of his children. The probability is, that the names, as names, would originally have some other import. Dr. Cassel supposes that they meant, respectively, *joy* and *ornament*; but he trusts to impossible etymologies. Raabe, taking his cue from Sanscrit roots, interprets the one thus—"He who brings gifts with him;" and the other thus—"He who conceals his wife in his house." Werner, taking his cue from Chaldee cognates, interprets the former of the two names as meaning *ready to forgive*, and the latter as holding forth the idea of *hopeful*. All of them unlikely derivations. And yet something quite distinct from the ideas of *sickness* and *consumption*, but lying so far on parallel lines of thought, may be conceived. The primary import of מַלְכוֹן, the root of *Machlon*, is apparently *to be tender*. Thence the word came by one line of thought to mean *to be physically tender*, that is, *to be sick*; and by another that runs out in Chaldee it came to mean *to be morally tender, to be mild or forgiving*. Machlon may mean *mildness* or *tender-heartedness*. Again, the primary idea of חִילֹן, the root of *Chilion*, is *to complete*. But, besides the completion that is realised in *consuming, consumption, or ending*, there is *moral completeness, the completeness or finish that is realised in perfection* (see Ps. cxix. 96: "I have seen an end of all perfection"). This idea of *beautiful completeness, or perfection*, is more likely to be the meaning of the name than the idea of *consumptiveness, or consumption*. **Ephrathites of Bethlehem Judah.** It is not simply the two sons who are so designated. It is the whole group. They were Ephrathites, that is, Bethlehemites, for the old name of Bethlehem was Ephrath, or Ephratha. As, however, the word Ephrathite also meant Ephraimite (see Judges xii. 5; 1 Sam. i. 1; and 1 Kings xi. 26), it gave precision to the designation, although at the expense of a little redundancy, to say "Ephrathites of Bethlehem Judah." **And they came into the country of Moab.** The Hebrew emigrants reached the *fields or pastoral territory* of Moab. **And continued there.** The phrase in the original is of primitive simplicity—"and were there." It has been asked by theological critics whether Elimelech was justifiable in removing to an "idolatrous country" to avoid the inconveniences of a famine in the land of his nativity. It is enough to say in reply that there is no hint in the text itself

that the step taken was blamable or blamed. "No man ought," says Lawson, "to be condemned, whether dead or alive, without proofs of guilt; and no certain proofs of guilt appear in the present case." "The beam of Elimelech's judgment," says Dr. Thomas Fuller, "is *justly* weighed down to go from Bethlehem, Judah, into the land of Moab."

Vers. 3—5.—"In these words," says Fuller, "we have two marriages ushered and followed by funerals."

Vers. 3.—**And Elimelech Naomi's husband died.** Apparently soon after the settlement of the family. No details, however, are given, as, on the one hand, no blame is attached to the conduct of Elimelech, and as, on the other, the line of biographical interest runs in another direction. **And she was left, and her two sons.** Not only was the mother her husband's *relict*; they were all *left behind*. He had gone somewhither in advance, and they "remained." So the word is frequently rendered.

Vers. 4.—**And they took to themselves wives of the women of Moab.** It was their own act. Josephus, reproducing the narrative from memory, represents the event as occurring in the father's lifetime, and as brought about by his arrangement. He says of Elimelech, "Coming into the territory of Moab, he sojourns there, and, things prospering according to his mind, he gives in marriage to his sons (ἀγείρει τοῖς υἱοῖς) Moabitish wives." Theological critics have here again raised the question, Was it sinful in these emigrant Hebrews to take in marriage daughters of the land? The Chaldee Targumist did not hesitate in his decision. He begins his paraphrase of the verse thus: "And they transgressed the edict of the word of the Lord, and took to themselves alien wives of the daughters of Moab." Dr. Thomas Fuller represents Naomi as passionately remonstrating with her sons. He says of himself, "My mouth denieth to be the orator of an unjust action." "Nothing can be brought," he adds, "for the defence of these matches. Something may be said for the excuse of them, but that fetched not from piety, but from policy." It is noteworthy, however, that in the text itself, and throughout the entire Book, there is nothing of the nature of condemnation, not the least hint of blame. There was a law, indeed, which laid an interdict upon marriages with Canaanites (see Deut. vii. 3). But these Canaanites occupied a peculiar relation to the Hebrews. They were within the line of that Canaan which had become the land of Israel. Israelites and Canaanites were thus living within the same borders as rival claimants of the same territory. It was no wonder that the Canaanites' claim was not

to be recognised by the Hebrews. The Moabites, however, living within the lines or "coasts" of their own distinct territory, stood in quite a different relation. And while, for purity's sake, great restrictions were to be laid upon all overtures for naturalisation (Deut. xxiii. 3--6), yet the law could never be intended to apply to the families of Hebrews who were settlers in Moab, or to Moabitish females living in their own land, and rather awarding than seeking the prerogatives of natives. The name of the one was *Orpah*, and the name of the other *Ruth*. No doubt native Moabitish names. Much ingenuity has been expended on that of the more interesting person. Some have unwarrantably assumed that *Ruth* is a contraction of the Hebrew word רַחֵם meaning a *female companion* or *friend*. Still more unwarrantable, though more captivating to the æsthetic imagination, is the signification which is given to the word by Werner and Eadie, namely, *beauty*. It is founded on an impossible derivation from the Hebrew רוּחַ. Still more æsthetically captivating is the conjecture of Cassel, that the name is the ancient Semitic form of the Indo-European word *rodon* or *rose*. "At all events," says he, "the thought of *Ruth* as the *Rose of Moab* is in itself too attractive not to be proposed as a conjecture." It is certainly most attractive and most admirable as a *jeu d'esprit*, but too imaginative to be vindicated on grounds of comparative philology. And they dwell there. Or, "settled themselves there;" literally, "sat there." We still call a gentleman's mansion his *seat*. About ten years,

which, however, are treated by the writer as a mere blank in his story. He hastens on.

Ver. 5.—And, to make a long story short, *Machlon* and *Chilion* died also both of them. "Like green apples," says Fuller, "cudgelled off the tree." But why "cudgelled"? There is no evidence in the text of Divine displeasure, and the Christian expositor, when going beyond the text in quest of principles, should not forget the tower of Siloam, and the victims of Pilate's bloodthirstiness (see Luke xiii. 1--5). And the woman was left of her two children and of her husband. That is, "of her two children as well as of her husband." She became as it were their *relict* too. She remained behind after they had gone on before. If all sentiment were to be taken out of the expression, it might then be simply said, in very commonplace prose, *she survived them*. Poor woman! "Of the two sexes," says Fuller, "the woman is the weaker; of women, old women are most feeble; of old women, widows most woeful; of widows, those that are poor, their plight most pitiful; of poor widows, those who want children, their case most doleful; of widows that want children, those that once had them, and after lost them, their estate most desolate; of widows that have had children, those that are strangers in a foreign country, their condition most comfortable. Yet all these met together in Naomi, as in the centre of sorrow, to make the measure of her misery pressed down, shaken together, running over. I conclude, therefore, many men have had affliction—none like Job; many women have had tribulation—none like Naomi."

## HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1--5.—*The emigrants and their trials*. We are introduced to the Hebrew family into which the Moabitess Ruth was married.

I. THE BEAUTIFUL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE NAMES OF both the Hebrew parents.

II. THE WOLF OF HUNGER HAD COME PROWLING TO THE HEBREWS' DOOR. In those conditions of society in which there is little commerce to unite people to people, or when a city is in a state of siege, the consequences of famine are inexpressibly sad and harrowing. Examples:—The recurring famines in India; the famine in Jerusalem when besieged by the Romans, and as narrated by Josephus; the famine in Leyden, when that city was, in 1573, besieged by the Spaniards, and when one of the patriotic magistrates—a noble soul—said to the hungry and mutinous people, "Friends, here is my body. Divide it among you to satisfy your hunger; but banish all thoughts of surrendering to the cruel and perfidious Spaniard." As commerce, however, grows under the fostering care of those Christian influences that aim at realising the brotherhood of all earth's nations, local famines become more and more amenable to control and neutralisation.

III. THE HEBREW FAMILY WAS CONSTRAINED TO EMIGRATE. Many tender ties get ruptured when emigration takes place. But the heart is pulled onward by new hopes. Consider the importance of emigration from old and over-crowded countries to the numerous rich fields lying fallow abroad. These fields are just awaiting the presence of the cultivator to pour forth into the lap of industry

overflowing riches of food for the teeming millions of mother countries, and corresponding riches of raw material for the skilled and skilful hands of manufacturers.

IV. THE EMIGRANTS SEEM TO HAVE GOT A CORDIAL WELCOME IN MOAB. It was creditable to the Moabites. Kindness and sympathy should always be shown to strangers, and to all who are far removed from the sweet influences of home.

V. MORTALITY SOON SADLY RAVAGED THE HEBREW HOME. All are mortal. All must die. But in Christ—"the Resurrection and the Life"—we may get the victory even over death. He has "brought life and immortality to light." He who believeth in Him "shall never see death" (John viii. 51; xi. 26). He "hath," and "shall have," everlasting life.

## HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

*On the Book of Ruth.*—That the Book of Ruth is included in the canon of Scripture need excite no surprise.

I. IT IS A CHAPTER FROM THE HISTORY OF THE HUMAN HEART. Contrast it with the Book of Judges, to which it is a supplement, and which records feats of arms, deeds of heroism, treachery, violence, and murder. Here we are led aside from the highway of Hebrew history into a secluded by-path, a green lane of private life. Here are simple stories of heart and home. In human life, home, with its affections and relationships, plays an important part. In this Book we have a glimpse into the domestic life of Israel, with its anxieties, sorrows, and sweetness. Women and children, honest work and homely talk; deaths, births, and marriages; loves, memories, and prayers, are all here. The Bible is the book of man as God has made him.

II. IT IS A RECORD OF HUMAN VIRTUE, AND THE PROVIDENTIAL CARE AND REWARD ASSURED TO VIRTUE. Human kindness, filial piety, affectionate constancy, uncomplaining toil, true chastity, sweet patience, strong faith, noble generosity, simple piety—are all here, and they are all observed by God, and are shown to be pleasing to him, who rewards them in due time.

III. IT IS A PROOF OF THE SUPERIORITY OF HUMANITY TO NATIONALITY. The Hebrews are often blamed for intense exclusiveness and bigotry, yet no ancient literature is so liberal and catholic as the inspired books of the Old Testament. This narrative shows no trace of national narrowness; it proves that "God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him." A pure and gentle Moabitess is welcomed into a Hebrew home.

IV. IT SUPPLIES A LINK IN THE CHAIN OF THE GENEALOGY OF DAVID, AND OF THAT SON OF DAVID WHO WAS DAVID'S LORD. Ruth was one of three foreign women whose names are preserved in the table of our Lord's descent from Abraham.—T.

Vers. 1, 2.—*A family of Bethlehem.* This Book is precious as a record of domestic life. The peaceful, prosperous, happy home of the Ephrathite is rather suggested than described.

I. THE TIME AND STATE OF SOCIETY. "The days when the judges ruled." The preceding Book enables us to picture what times of unsettlement, and occasionally of anarchy, these were. The customs of the time were primitive, and the habits of the people were simple. The elders sat at the gates of the little city. Business was transacted with primitive simplicity. The tranquil course of agricultural life diversified by a feast at sheep-shearing, or a mirthful harvest-home.

II. THE SCENE. "Bethlehem-judah." The fields of Bethlehem, in the territory of Judah, are among the classic, the sacred spots of earth. 1. In Old Testament history. The home of Boaz; the scene of Ruth's gleanings, and of her marriage. In these pastures was trained, in the household of Jesse, and among his stalwart sons, the youthful David, who became the hero and the darling, the minstrel and the king, of Israel. 2. In New Testament history. Between the pastures of Bethlehem and the stars of heaven was sung the angels' song of good-will and peace. Here



was born the Son of David, who was the Son of God. The visit of the shepherds and the wise men. Herod's massacre of the babes, &c.

III. The PURSUITS of rural life. In Bethlehem-Ephrathah Elimelech had his inheritance. Here, for a time, he, like his fathers, tilled the fields and fed the flocks he owned in peace. Even in times of trouble and disorder some secluded spots are quiet; the bleating of the sheep is familiar, and the shouts of war are unheard. In most men's breasts the scenes and pursuits of rural life are cherished; perhaps it is hereditary. "God made the country." A simple and natural piety is fed by fellowship with nature, the work of God's own hands.

IV. The PEACEFUL JOYS of home. In the sweet society of his wife Naomi ("the pleasant"), his young sons Mahlon and Chilion, growing by his side in stature and intelligence, the freeholder of Bethlehem passed the jocund days. How can we think and speak quite worthily of the *family* and the *home*? Here is the Divine nursery of the soul, the Divine school of life! Let us have no terms with the fanatics who would reconstruct society upon another basis than domestic life. The great lesson—gratitude to Providence for peace, congenial occupation, and a happy home.—T.

Vers. 1, 2.—*Famine and impoverishment.* The former scene one bright and joyous. An honest Hebrew, of the tribe of Judah, living upon the land of his inheritance, with the wife of his heart and the children of his youth. Thus were formed the bonds which prosperity could not dissolve and adversity could not snap. Here were learned the hereditary and traditional lessons of faith, patience, forbearance, piety, and hope. A contrast follows.

I. FAMINE. Probably from some incursion of the hostile forces of Midian into the vale of Bethlehem; or, if not so, from a succession of bad harvests, or a failure of pasture, scarcity and famine invaded the abodes of plenty and of peace.

II. IMPOVERISHMENT. Upon Elimelech the pressure of the times was peculiarly severe, compelling him to break up his home, quit the modest but cherished inheritance of his fathers, and seek subsistence elsewhere.

Lessons:—1. Change of circumstances is a common incident in human life. Every person has either experienced some such change, or has witnessed such reverse in the condition of kindred or acquaintance. A fall from comfort, or even affluence, to poverty frequently happens among occupiers, and even owners, of land, and still more frequently in manufacturing and commercial communities. 2. Religion teaches sympathy with those in reduced circumstances. When a neighbour is deprived not only of the usual conveniences of life, but of the means of educating his children and of providing for his old age, we should not offer reproach, or even cold, hard advice, but, if possible, substantial help, and always considerate sympathy. 3. Religion has consolation for those in adversity. A message from heaven bids them "be of good cheer!" Let diligence and frugality contend with circumstances! Be patient and uncomplaining, and avoid that sign of a petty and broken spirit, the dwelling fondly upon bygone prosperity! The sun of prosperity may yet break through the clouds. Even if it be not so appointed, there may still remain those blessings which are dearer than fortune's gifts—wife, child, a good conscience, health, fortitude, hope! If calamity has come upon you through your own fault, repent, and learn "the sweet uses of adversity." If through the fault of others, refrain your heart from malice and revenge, and your lips from cursing. Think rather of what Heaven has left than of what Heaven has taken. "Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven." Remember that, if Christians, "all things are yours!"—T.

Vers. 1, 2.—*Emigration.* Picture the removal of this family from the home they loved. Taking with them, it may be, the remnant of their cattle, they bade adieu to the familiar scenes where they had known content and plenty, where they had formed their friendships and alliances. The best prospect for them lay towards the east, and eastwards accordingly they travelled. Whether they struck southwards by the foot of the Salt Sea, or crossed the Jordan at the ford, they must soon have reached the verdant highlands of Moab. Here it was they were to seek a settlement and make a home.

I. THESE CHANGES OF abode are IN ACCORDANCE WITH PROVIDENTIAL APPOINTMENT. Migrations have at all times been common among pastoral, nomadic people. The tillers of the soil and the dwellers in cities have been more stationary. Emigration a great fact in the social life of Britain in our time. Owing to the increase of population, to geographical discovery, to the application of steam to ocean voyages, emigration common among our artisan and agricultural classes. Some become colonists through the pressure of the times; others from love of adventure, and desire for a freer life. All of us have friends who have emigrated. Thus God replenishes his earth.

II. THESE CHANGES AFFECT DIFFERENTLY DIFFERENT PERSONS. Naomi would feel the severance most keenly, and would look forward with least interest and hope to new surroundings and acquaintances. Her sons would not realise the bitterness of change; the novelty of the circumstances would naturally excite and charm them. Picture the emigrants, the friends they leave behind, the scenes awaiting them, &c.

III. THESE CHANGES SHOULD BE WATCHED BY CHRISTIANS WITH WISE AND PRAYERFUL INTEREST. Remember that the undecided are yonder free from many restraints. By prayer and correspondence seek to retain them under the power of the truth. Guide emigration into hopeful channels; induce colonists to provide for themselves the word of God, the means of education, the ministry of the gospel.—T.

Ver. 3.—*Widowhood*. In the country of Moab Elimelech and his family found a home. A period of repose seems to have been granted them. They learned to reconcile themselves to new scenes and associations. But life is full of vicissitude. "Boast not thyself of to-morrow." O, to live as those whose treasure and whose heart are above! "Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died; and she was left." A brief, pathetic record!

I. The widow's SORROW. The observation of all, the experience of some hearers, may fill up the outline. In every social circle, in every religious assembly, are women who have been called upon to part with those upon whom they had leaned for support and guidance, to whom they gave their hearts in youth, to whom they had borne sons and daughters.

II. The widow's LOT. It is often one of hardship and trouble. As in the case before us, it may be aggravated by—1. Poverty. 2. Distance from home and friends. 3. The charge and care of children, who, though a blessing, are a burden and responsibility.

III. The widow's CONSOLATION. 1. The promise of God: "Thy Maker is thy husband." 2. Opportunity of Christian service. How different the widow's condition in Christian communities from that of such among the heathen! The honour and the work of "widows indeed."

Lessons:—1. Submission and patience under bereavement. 2. Sympathy with the afflicted and desolate.—T.

Ver. 4.—*Marriage*. The notes of time found in this narrative are meagre. It is not easy to decide to what the "ten years" here mentioned refer. After the death of Elimelech, the two sons were spared to be the occupation and the solace of the widow's life. Naomi saw them grow up to manhood. Then the young men "took them wives of the women of Moab."

I. MARRIAGE IS LAWFUL BETWEEN PERSONS OF DIFFERENT NATIONS. There was nothing in the law of Moses to prevent these young men from acting as they did, although the children of Israel were not allowed to intermarry with the Canaanites. Later in Jewish history Nehemiah interpreted the law as forbidding marriage with the children of Moab. But he seems to have acted with unjust severity. These Moabitish women were virtuous, kind, devoted; conformed to the religion of their husbands, and one of them found a solid satisfaction in the worship of Jehovah. The conduct of the young men seems to have been natural and blameless.

II. MARRIAGE SHOULD ONLY BE ENTERED UPON AFTER SERIOUS AND PRAYERFUL DELIBERATION, AND WITH A CONVICTION OF ITS ACCEPTABLENESS TO GOD. Sensible and Christian people should discountenance the practice of treating marriage with levity. Consideration should be given to time, to circumstances, and, above all, to

character. Confidence and esteem must be, with affection, the basis of wedded happiness; and these cannot exist in their completeness where there is dissimilarity of conviction and aim—where one party is living to the world, and the other would live unto the Lord. Error here involves misery, and perhaps disaster and ruin.

Lessons:—1. Let elders inculcate just views of the marriage relationship upon the young. 2. Let the young avoid committing themselves to a contract of marriage until a fair experience of life has been acquired. 3. Let Christians marry “only in the Lord.”—T.

Ver. 5.—*Double desolation.* In the happiness of her children Naomi would revive the happy years of her own early married life. But the bright sky was soon clouded over by the shadow of death. Perhaps inheriting their father's constitution, her sons died in early manhood. She became a childless widow. Three widows were in one house, each bearing in her silent heart her own burden of grief.

I. SOME ARE CALLED UPON TO ENDURE REPEATED BEREAVEMENTS. Households there are which have been visited again and again by the angel of death. Youthful lives are snapt asunder; youthful hearts are left desolate. Some are called upon to endure prolonged age, whilst children and friends, the joy of their hearts, are taken from them. Here and there is one who can exclaim, “All thy waves and thy billows are gone over me.”

II. FOR SUCH GOD HAS PROMISES OF GRACE AND PURPOSES OF MERCY. 1. The assurances of the Divine remembrance and kindness. “The mountains shall depart,” &c. 2. The sympathy of the Divine High Priest. The miracle of the raising of the widow's son at Nain is an illustration. 3. Grace of submission shall be imparted. “The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.” 4. Intentions of Divine wisdom shall be accomplished. Thus shall the heart be weaned from earth; thus shall Christian character be matured; thus shall saints be prepared for glory. How can the vicissitudes of life be borne by those who are strangers to Christian principles, to Christian consolations, to Christian hopes? May ours be the happy lot of the Christian, from whom (as from all the children of men) the future is hidden; but who knows himself to be the object of a Father's love and a Saviour's care, and to whose heart comes day by day a voice from heaven, saying, “I will never leave thee! I will never forsake thee!”—T.

Ver. 1.—“In the days when the judges ruled.” This is the age in which the story happened which constitutes Ruth's history, beautiful as an epic, and touching as a pathetic drama of home life. The judges. Whether the earlier or later we know not. Whether in the days of Deborah or the days of Gideon. Probably, however, the latter, as history tells then of a famine through the invasion of the Midianites. The judges. Religion means law, order, mutual respect, and, with all diversity of circumstance, equality in the eyes of the law. A nation that perverts justice has undermined the foundations of the commonwealth.

I. ALL JUDGES ARE REPRESENTATIVES AND INTERPRETERS OF THE LAW. They are not creators of it; they are not allowed to govern others according to their own will, but they are to be fair and wise interpreters of the national jurisprudence. Law is a beautiful thing if it is founded on the Divine sanctions; it means protection for the weak, safety for the industrious.

II. THE BEST ADMINISTRATION CANNOT MEET THE WANT CAUSED BY WARS. Famine came! The Midianites came up and “destroyed the increase of the earth.” “And Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites.” Here are the old border wars. Nature was as beautiful as ever, and the flowers of Palestine as fragrant, and the corn as golden; but the enamelled cup of the flower was soon filled with the blood of slaughter, and the beautiful sheaves were pillaged to supply the overrunning enemies of Israel. Such is the heart of man. In every age out of that come forth wars; and although modern legislation is enabled to fill the empty granary from other shores, yet in the main it still remains true, war means, in the end, not only bloodshed and agony, but want.

III. ALL EARTHLY RULERSHIP IS THE SYMBOL OF A HIGHER GOVERNMENT. As the

fatherly relationship is symbolical of the Divine Fatherhood, and the monarchical of the Divine King, so the earthly judge is to be the emblem of a Divine Ruler, whose reign is righteousness, and who hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world. There are schools of thought that question human responsibility, that teach a doctrine of irresistible law, the predicate of which is, that sin is not so much criminal or vicious, as the result of innate tendencies which come under the dominion of resistless inclinations. But it is to be noticed that these teachers would not excuse the thief who has robbed *them*, or the murderer who has slain *their* child. To be consistent, however, they ought; for they object to punishment in the plan of the Divine government. Human instinct, however, and Divine revelation are at one in this; alike they ask, "Wherefore should a man complain, a man for the punishment of his sin?" In all ages and amongst all races where society is secure, and progress real, and innocence safe, they are "those where the judges rule."—W. M. S.

Ver. 1.—"There was a famine in the land." Providence led Elimelech, his wife Naomi, and his two sons Mahlon and Chilion, into the land of Moab, on the other side of Jordan. Whilst there was scarcity of bread in Israel, there was plenteous supply in Moab. So they left their fatherland and home in Bethlehem. We carry "home" with us when we go with wife and children. It is the exile's solitary lot that is so sad. It is when God setteth the solitary in families, and the child is away from home in a foreign land, amongst strange faces, that the heart grows sick. We ought always to remember in prayer the exile and the stranger. Sometimes, amongst the very poor, a man has to go and seek substance far away from wife and child; but in this case sorrow was mitigated by mutual sympathy and help.

I. THERE ARE WORSE FAMINES THAN THIS. It was famine of another sort that led Moses from Egypt, when he feared not the wrath of the king, that he might enjoy the bread of God; and it was religious hunger that led the Pilgrim Fathers first to Amsterdam, and then to New England, that they might find liberty to worship God. In the day of famine we read Elimelech could not be satisfied. No. And it is a mark of spiritual nobility never to be contented where God is dishonoured and worship demoralised. The word "Bethlehem" signifies the house of bread; but there was barrenness in the once wealthy place of harvest. And the name of Church cannot suffice when the place is no longer the house of God, which the word Church means.

II. IN THIS FAMINE ELIMILECH'S NAME WAS A GUARANTEE OF GUIDANCE AND SUPPLY. It means, "My God is King." Beautiful that. He reigns, and will cause all things to work together for good. Mark the words, My God; for as Paul says, "My God shall supply all your need." King! Yes, "the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof," and he will not let his children want bread. They go without escort, but the Lord goes before them. There are no camels or caravanserais behind them, but the Lord God of Israel is their rereward. So is Divine promise translated into family history.

III. THE TROUBLE THAT SEEMS LEAST LIKELY OFTEN COMES. Bread wanting in Bethlehem, "the house of bread." Yes! But have not we often seen this? The sorrows of life are often such surprises. They do not take the expected form of the imagination, but they assume shapes which we never dreamed of. The king not only loses his crown, but becomes an exile and a stranger in a strange land. The rich man in health loses all in a night. A sudden flicker, and the lamp of health which always burned so brightly goes out in an hour.

IV. BETHLEHEM WAS A QUIET, RESTFUL ABODE. Nestling in its quiet beauty, ten miles or so from time-beloved Jerusalem, who would have thought that the golden ring of corn-fields which surrounded it would ever have been taken off its hand? Very early in history it was productive. Here Jacob fed his sheep in the olden times. Famine in a city impoverished and beleaguered we can understand; but famine in Bethlehem! So it is. The rural quietness does not always give us repose. There too the angel with the veiled face comes—the angel of grief and want and death. Happy those who have a Father in heaven who is also their Father and their King.—W. M. S.

Vers. 4, 5.—*A foreign land.* "And they dwelled there about ten years." Memorable years! Marriages and births had given place to separation and bereavement. Elimelech the father died; so also did the two sons Mahlon and Chilion. Thus we have the sad picture of three widows.

I. WE CAN FLY FROM FAMINE, BUT NOT FROM DEATH. We need not enter upon the argument of some expositors, as to whether Elimelech did right to leave Bethlehem; whether by famine is not meant insufficiency of plenty rather than actual want. We must be content with the fact that he thought it prudent and wise to go. And now with fulness of bread came the saddest experience of all. How often it happens that when circumstances improve, those we hoped to enjoy them with are taken away. We climb the hill together, and then with new and fair prospect comes the desolation of death amid the beauties and blessings of earth and sky. These are darker clouds than covered them in Bethlehem. We never know how dear are the living till they are gone; then we see it was their presence that gave life and peace to so many scenes, that gave inspiration to labour and sweetness to success.

II. TROUBLES OFTEN COME WAVE UPON WAVE. Ten years! and lo, three out of the four pilgrims are at rest. No more fatigue, no more distress for them. True; but those that are left! What of them? It is often easier to go than to remain. It is all summed up in the consciousness, I have but to live, and to live without them. Nor is this a morbid feeling. It is a most sacred emotion. True, time will alleviate; but there will always be graves in the heart, and men and women who have lost their beloved ones can never be the same again. Character will be softened, purified, elevated. Heaven will be nearer and dearer to the heart. Ten years! How fleetly they fly, and yet what a long volume of experience may be bound up in them.

III. EVERY HOME IS BUT AS A TENT LIFE. They dwelled there. Got used to the new people, the new skies, the new ways. After a time, to a family removed to another shore, there are always some tendrils gathering round the place, and in time they feel in leaving *that* a sense of loss. Strange as it all seemed at first, in time touches of experience make it homelike to them. Still the old first home, the dear village of childhood and youth, nestles in the heart. How many in life's evening like to go back and live near the abode of the morning. We dwell! So it seems; and we look at the picture of the world's life-pilgrimage as though, like some panorama, it was all *outside* us. But we pass onward too, and ere long grey hairs are here and there upon us, though we know it not. At times we look back. Ten years! And their experience is within us, as well as behind us.—W. M. S.

## EXPOSITION.

### CHAPTER I. 6-14.

Ver. 6.—*Then*—the conjunction in Hebrew is the common generic copulative *and*—*she* arose. She had been *sitting*, as it were, where her husband had settled, and she now rose up to depart (see ver. 4). *She, and her daughters-in-law.* The word for "her daughters-in-law"—*בנות חמ*—is literally "her brides," that is, the brides of her sons. *That she might return*—an admirable rendering into English idiom. The phrase in the original is simply "and she returned," that is, "and she began to 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. Or, more literally, "for she heard in the country of Moab that Jehovah"—or, rather, "Yahveh," or, as Epiphanius gives it, *Ιαβι*—"had visited his people to give them bread." There is no warrant, however, and no need,

to add, with the Chaldee Targumist, that the news was conveyed *by the mouth of an angel*. And the representation is not that Yahveh, in giving bread to his people, had thereby visited them; it is that he had visited them "to give them bread." The word *בָּרַךְ*, rendered *visited*, is quite peculiar, with no analogue in English, German, Greek, or Latin. Yahveh had *directed his attention* to his people, and had, so to speak, *made inquisition into their state*, and had hence taken steps to give them bread (see Exod. iii. 16; iv. 31). They had already got it, or, as the Septuagint translates, they had got *loaves* (*ἀρτοι*). The Vulgate translates it *meats* (*escas*). It is assumed in the tidings that the seasons and their products, and all beneficent influences in nature, belong to Yahveh. It is likewise assumed that the Hebrews were his people, albeit not in such a sense as to secure for them more "bread" and "milk and honey" than other peoples

enjoyed. Their chief prerogatives were spiritual and moral. *They were his Messianic people.* That is the key to unlock the secret of the whole Old Testament Scriptures.

Ver. 7.—And so she went forth out of the place where she was. There is no attempt on the part of the writer to localise the spot. And her two daughters-in-law with her. They had kept, it seems, on terms of affectionate sympathy with their mother-in-law. The jealousies that so often disturb the peace of households had no place within the bounds of Naomi's jurisdiction. The home of which she was the matronly centre had been kept in its own beautiful orbit by the law of mutual respect, deference, affection, and esteem—the law that insures happiness to both the loving and the loved. “If there were more Naomis,” says Lawson, “there might be more Orpahs and Ruths.” And they went on the way to return to the land of Judah. Having left her Moabitish abode, and got into the frequented track which led in the direction of her native land, she journeyed onward for a stage or two, accompanied by her daughters-in-law. Such is the picture. It must be subsumed in it that her daughters-in-law had made up their minds to go with her to the land of her nativity. The subject had been often talked over and discussed. Naomi would from time to time start objections to their kind intention. They, on their part, would try to remove her difficulties, and would insist on accompanying her. So the three widows journeyed onward together, *walking*. Adversity had pressed hard on their attenuated resources, and they would not be encumbered with burdensome baggage.

Ver. 8.—And Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, Go, return each to her mother's house. She reverted, with deeper earnestness, to their theme of discussion. She acknowledged that most kindly had they acted toward her. Her heart was filled with gratitude. It was likewise agitated with grief at the prospect of bidding them a final farewell. Nevertheless, she felt that it would be unreasonable and unkind to invite them to be, to any further degree, sharers of her adversity. Hence, thanking them for their loving convoy, she would remind them that every step further on would only increase the length of their return-journey; and she said, Go, return each to her mother's home. There, in the females' apartment, and in the bosom of their mothers, they would surely find a welcome and a refuge. She judges of their mothers by herself, and she refers rather to them than to their fathers, partly, perhaps, because she bears in mind her own motherhood, but principally, no doubt, because, in

those Oriental countries, it lay very particularly within the province of mothers to make arrangements in reference to their daughters. *May Yahveh deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the deceased, and with me.* It is beautiful gratitude, and at the same time a touching monument to the faithfulness and gentleness that had characterised and adorned the young widows. Her simple Hebrew theology, moreover, comes finely out. She assumes that her own Yahveh reigned in Moab as in Judah, and that all blessing descended from him. There is a little peculiarity in the Hebrew pronouns in this clause. They are masculine instead of feminine. The influence of the stronger sex overrides grammatically, for the moment, the influence of the weaker.

Ver. 9.—*May Yahveh grant to you that ye may find rest, each in the house of her husband.* Naomi again, when the current of her tenderest feelings was running full and strong, lifts up her longing heart toward her own Yahveh. He was the God not of the Hebrews only, but of the Gentiles likewise, and ruled and overruled in Moab. The prayer is, in its form, full of syntactical peculiarity: “May Yahveh give to you,” and, as the result of his giving, “may you find rest, each [in] the house of her husband.” The expression, “the house of her husband,” is used locatively. It is an answer to the suppressed question, “Where are they to find rest?” And hence, in our English idiom, we must insert the preposition, “in the house of her husband.” As to the substance of the prayer, it has, as truly as the grammatical syntax, its own tinge of Orientalism. Young females in Moab had but little scope for a life of usefulness and happiness, unless shielded round and round within the home of a pure and devoted husband. Naomi was well aware of this, and hence, in her motherly solicitude for her virtuous daughters-in-law, she gave them to understand that it would be the opposite of a griet to her if they should seek, in the one way open to them in that comparatively undeveloped state of society, to brighten the homes of the lonely. In such homes, if circumstances were propitious, they would find deliverance from unrest and anxiety. They would find *rest*. It would be a position in which they could *abide*, and in which their tenderest feelings and most honourable desires would find satisfaction and *repose*. The peculiar force of the Hebrew *shakan* is finely displayed by the texture of the associated expressions in Isa. xxxii. 17, 18: “And the work of righteousness shall be *peace*; and the effect of righteousness *quietness and assurance for ever*; and my people shall dwell in a *peaceable habitation*, and in *sure dwellings*, and in *quiet resting-places*”

(וַתִּשָּׁק). And she kissed them, locking them lingeringly and lovingly in a farewell embrace. "Kissed them." The preposition *to*, according to the customary Hebrew idiom, stands before the pronoun. In kissing, Naomi imparted herself passionately to her beloved daughters-in-law, and clung to them. There would be full-hearted reciprocation, and each to each would cling "in their embracement, as they grew together" (Shakespeare, *Henry VIII.*). And they lifted up their voice and wept. The idea is not that all three wept aloud. The pronoun "they" refers to the daughters-in-law, as is evident both from the preceding and from the succeeding context. The fine idiomatic version of the Vulgate brings out successfully and unambiguously the true state of the case—*quæ elevata voce flere cæperunt*. The lifting up of the voice in weeping must be thought of according to the measure of Oriental, as distinguished from Occidental, custom. In the East there is less self-restraint in this matter than in the West.

Ver. 10.—And they said unto her, Surely we will return with thee unto thy people. So King James's version. The expression in the original is broken at the commencement: "And they said to her, For with thee we shall return to thy people." It is as if they had said, "Do not insist on our return to our mothers' homes, for with thee we shall return to thy people." Note the expression, "we shall return," instead of "we shall go with thee in thy return to thy people." For the moment they identify themselves with their mother-in-law, as if they had come with her from Judah.

Ver. 11.—And Naomi said, Turn back, my daughters. To what purpose should you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb, that might be husbands to you? According to the old Levirate law—a survival of rude and barbarous times—Orpah and Ruth, having had husbands who died without issue, would have been entitled to claim marriage with their husbands' brothers, if such surviving brothers there had been (see Deut. xxv. 5—9; Matt. xxii. 24—28). And if the surviving brothers were too young to be married, the widows, if they chose, might wait on till they reached maturity (see Gen. xxxviii.). It is in the light of these customs that we are to read Naomi's remonstrances. The phraseology in the second interrogation is very primitive, and primitively 'agglutinative.' "Are there yet to be sons in my womb, and they shall be to you for husbands?" (see on ver. 1).

Ver. 12.—Turn back, my daughters, go; for I am too old to have a husband. But even if I could say, I have hope; yea, even if I had a husband this very night; yea, even if I had already given birth to sons;

(ver. 13) would ye therefore wait till they grew up! would ye therefore shut yourselves up so as not to have husbands! nay, my daughters; for my lot is exceedingly bitter, more than even yours, for the hand of Yahveh has gone out against me. Most pathetic pleading, and not easily reproduced on lines of literal rendering. "Go, for I am too old to have a husband." A euphemistic rendering; but the original is euphemistic too, though under another phraseological phase. "But even if I could say, I have hope." The poverty of the Hebrew verb, in respect of provision to express "moods," is conspicuous: "that," i. e. "suppose that I said, I have hope." Mark the climactic representation. *Firstly*, Naomi makes, for argument's sake, the supposition that she might yet have sons; then, *secondly*, she carries her supposition much higher, namely, that she might that very night have a husband; and then, *thirdly*, she carries the supposition a great deal higher still, namely, that even already her sons were brought forth: "Would you therefore wait?" Note *the therefore*. Ibn Ezra, the Septuagint, the Vulgate, and King James's version assume that *וְעַתָּה* means *for them*. The feminine pronoun, however, as applied to Naomi's sons, is, on that supposition, all but inexplicable. It is much better to assume, with the majority of modern critics, that it is equivalent to *וְעַתָּה*, whether we call it a Chaldaism or not. Certainly it was current in Chaldee (see Dan. ii. 6, 9). But it may have floated in circles of Semitic society that were never included within Chaldee proper. Indeed, there were no precise limits bounding off the Chaldee language from the kindred dialects, just as there are no such limits in English or in German, or in any member of a linguistic group. Idioms often overlap. In the two interrogative clauses, "Would ye for that purpose wait till they grew up? Would ye for that purpose seclude yourselves, so as not to have husbands?" there is a parallelism; only, in the second clause, the representation rises. "For my lot is exceedingly bitter, more than even yours;" literally, "for it is bitter to me exceedingly, beyond you." The verb is used impersonally. Naomi means that her case was even more lamentable than theirs, so that she could not encourage them to hang their dependence on her help, or to hope for a retrieval of their circumstances in becoming partakers of her fortunes. The translation of King James's version, "for your sakes," though decidedly supported by the Septuagint, is unnatural. Pagnin and Drusius both give the correct rendering, "more than you." So do Michaelis and Wright. But Bertheau and Gesenius agree with King James's ver-

sion. The Syriac Peshito, strange to say, gives both translations, "I feel very bitterly for you, and to me it is more bitter than to you."

Ver. 14.—**And they**, the daughters-in-law, **lifted up their voice** in unison and unity, as if instead of two voices there had been but one. Hence the propriety of the singular number, as in ver. 9. **And wept again**. The "again" doubles back on the statement in ver. 9. With uplifted voice, in shrill Oriental wail, and amid streams of tears, they bemoaned their hapless lot. Then, after the paroxysm of grief had somewhat spent itself, Orpah yielded to her mother-in-law's dissuaves, and at length imprinted on her, reluctantly and passionately, a farewell kiss. Then, not waiting to ascertain the ultimate decision of Ruth, or rather, perhaps, having now a fixed presentiment what it would be, she moved regretfully and tearfully away. She was afraid, perhaps, that if she, as well as Ruth, should insist on accompanying her mother-in-law, the two might be unreason-

ably burdensome to the aged widow. Perhaps, too, she was not without fear that her own burden in a foreign land, amid strangers, might be too heavy to be borne. There is not, however, the slightest need for supposing that she was, in any respect, deficient in attachment to her mother-in-law. But, it is added, **Ruth clave to her mother-in-law**, all reasonings, remonstrances, dissuaves on Naomi's part notwithstanding. Ruth would not be parted from her. "Clave." It is the same word that is used in the primitive law of marriage. "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife, and they shall be one flesh" (Gen. ii. 24). It occurs again in Ps. lxxiii. 8: "*My soul followeth hard after thee*;" and in Ps. cxix. 31: "*I have stuck to thy testimonies*." Joshua said, "*Cleave unto the Lord thy God*" (Josh. xxiii. 8); and many have had sweet, while others have had bitter, experience of the truth that "there is a friend that *sticketh closer than a brother*" (Prov. xviii. 24).

#### HOMILETICS.

Vers. 6—14.—*Longing for the old home*. Brings to view (1) Naomi's resolution to return to the land of Judah, and then it records (2) a touching scene that occurred at her departure.

I. NAOMI'S RESOLUTION. No wonder that she formed it; for—1. The ties that bound her to the land of Moab had been snapped by the hand of death. In the death of her *husband* there was the disruption of the *house-band*. In the deaths of her two sons who had become *husbands*, the only other *bands* or *bonds* that could keep together for Naomi a home in Moab were burst. Matthew Henry says, "The land of Moab was now become a melancholy place to her. It is with little pleasure that she can breathe in that air in which her husband and sons had expired; or go on that ground in which they lay buried out of her sight, but not out of her thoughts." 2. Her heart had got sick for the home of her youth, that home which was now to her imagination and recollection "home, sweet home." "Heaven," she remembered, "lay around her" in her childhood. And such feelings as then thrilled within her are the stuff out of which, as years roll on, patriotism is woven. 3. She was reduced to absolute poverty. Diseases and death are costly, especially in a strange land, among strangers. And pitiable is the condition of those who, in a strange land and among strangers, are unable to "pay their way." 4. She would shrink, moreover, from the possibility of being burdensome to her daughters-in-law, who might, in consequence of their own widowhood, have difficulty in lending efficient assistance. However much she was pulled down in her circumstances, in her spirit her fine womanly independence stood erect. 5. She had learned that brighter days had dawned on the land of her early love. "The Lord had visited his people to give them bread." And "bread," as Dr. Thomas Fuller remarks, "is a dish in every course. Without it can be no feast; with it can be no famine." The Lord gave it. "The miracle of the loaves was a sudden putting forth of God's bountiful hand from behind the veil of his ordinary providence; the miracle of the harvest is the working of the same bountiful hand, only unseen, giving power to the living grains to drink the dew and imbibe the sunshine, and appropriate the nourishment of the soil during the long bright days of summer. I understand the one miracle in the light of the other" (Macmillan's *Bible Teachings in Nature*, p. 92).

II. SCENE AT NAOMI'S DEPARTURE. 1. Her daughters-in-law, who had "dealt kindly" with their husbands, had likewise dealt kindly with her. What was to become



of them? 2. They convoyed Naomi for some distance, and then, as they all halted, she reminded them that every step in advance took them further from their mothers' homes, and she insisted on their returning. Not for her own sake, however, but for theirs. In their own land their prospects would be brighter than in Judæa. Their mothers were still living, and would no doubt be motherly. Their other relatives would be at hand. They themselves might each be the means of brightening some solitary home. She prayed that they might have "rest." This word, so sweet to the weary and the distracted, reveals one element that is essential to the comfort of a home, whether that home be a cottage or a castle. 3. Naomi's words overwhelm the hearts of her daughters-in-law. They passionately express their desire to accompany her to her old home. But she persists firmly, though tenderly and meltingly, in her dissuaves. It is a scene of weeping—a valley of Baca. At length Orpah yields, and tears herself away. But Ruth would not yield. She "clave to her mother-in-law." The character of both the young widows is beautiful, but that of Ruth is heroic. This world is a constantly chequered scene of arrivals and departures. Looming in the near or more remote future, there is one departure which must be made "in solemn loneliness." Whither? With what convoy?

### HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 8.—*Kindness*. Tidings reached Naomi that peace and plenty had returned to Judah, and she resolved to return to Bethlehem. She acknowledged the Lord's goodness, who "had visited his people in giving them bread." Doubtless she sought the Lord's guidance with reference to her return. It must have needed courage on her part to form and carry out this resolution. Her affectionate daughters-in-law accompanied her part of the way. Then came the hour of separation. As Naomi bade the young widows return, she uttered words of testimony to their kindness, words of prayer that Heaven might deal kindly with them. Coming from her lips, this witness was precious. They had dealt kindly with the dead—their husbands, her sons. They had dealt kindly with her, in her bereavements and loneliness; they had sympathised with her, and now were willing to accompany her to the land of her birth and early days.

I. THE FOUNDATION of kindness. We must seek this below what is called "good nature;" and, taught by Christianity, must find it in the brotherhood of man, the fatherhood of God. The sacrifice of Christ is the power and the model of true Christian kindness.

II. THE SPHERE of kindness. The family, as in the passage before us, comes first. "Kind" is related, as a word, to "kin." "Charity begins at home." But, as has been remarked, it does not end there. Kindness should be shown to our fellow-creatures, as Christians, as neighbours, as fellow-countrymen, as members of the human race.

III. THE DIFFICULTIES in the way of kindness. It is not always easy for persons of one nation to agree with those of another; foreigners are often foes. It is not always easy for mothers-in-law to agree with daughters-in-law. Yet these difficulties may be overcome, as in this narrative.

IV. THE RECOMPENSE of kindness. Naomi's prayer was answered, and the Lord dealt kindly with those who had shown kindness. True kindness will breathe many a prayer. And the Lord's loving-kindness, condescending, unmerited, and free, is his people's most precious possession; it is "better than life!"—T.

Vers. 10—14.—*Separation*. These three women were bound together by the memory of common happiness, by the memory of common sorrows. The proposal that they should part, however reasonable and just, could not but reopen the flood-gates of their grief. Orpah found her consolation in her home in Moab, and Ruth found hers in Naomi's life-long society and affection. But as the three stand before us on the borders of the land, as Naomi begs her daughters-in-law to return, the sorrow and the sanctity of human separations are suggested to our minds.

I. SEPARATIONS BETWEEN LOVING FRIENDS ARE OFTEN EXPEDIENT AND NECESSARY.

II. SEPARATIONS ARE SOMETIMES THE OCCASION OF ALMOST THE BITTEREST SORROWS OF HUMAN LIFE.

III. SEPARATIONS MAY, BY GOD'S GRACE, BE MADE A DISCIPLINE OF THE SOUL'S HEALTH AND WELFARE.

IV. SEPARATIONS MAY BE OVERRULED, BY GOD'S PROVIDENCE, FOR THE REAL GOOD, PROSPERITY, AND HAPPINESS OF THOSE WHO ARE PUT APART.

V. SEPARATIONS REMIND US OF HIM WHO HAS SAID, "I WILL NEVER LEAVE THEE; I WILL NEVER FORSAKE THEE!"—T.

Vers. 6, 7.—*Home returning.* "Then she arose with her daughters-in-law, that she might return. . . . And they went on their way to return." Home again! The first step is everything! "She arose." It was all well with the prodigal when he *did* that. Not simply when he said, I will arise; but when he arose and went to his father. Directly the eye and the heart and the step agree, then the whole is settled. We read nothing of the preliminaries of departure. Who does not know the power of the loadstone when it first begins to act? When the breeze swells the sail from the foreign port, the sailor sees *not* the intervening waters, but the home cottage under the familiar cliffs. There are many beautiful home-returnings in the Bible, but the best of all is the son seeking the father's house.

I. HEARTS ARE UNITED BY COMMON EXPERIENCES. These daughters-in-law were not of her land, nor of her religion; they were not Hebrews; but they were widows! A common sorrow is a welding power, uniting hearts more closely than before. It is said that a babe in a house is a new clasp of affection between husband and wife. True; but an empty cradle has done more than a living child. During the time of these ten years these two wives remained still heathen. We do not know what family they sprang from, or if they were sisters. We do know that Naomi exercised no control or domination over their religious principles. She respects their personal liberty and responsibility; she even urges Ruth not to let natural affection for her override her religious convictions, but to go back to "her gods," as Orpah did. "Behold, thy sister-in-law is gone back unto her people, and unto her gods: return thou after thy sister-in-law." What a sorrow it must have been to her that her sons had married heathen women. We can respect that sorrow. And we can see that Naomi did not *slight* her own religion when she said these words, but used them as a test of the sincerity of Ruth. A common sorrow had brought them all very close together. "For," as Bailey says in Festus, "the world is one, and hath one great heart."

II. RETURN JOURNEYS HAVE A TOUCHING ELOQUENCE IN THEIR SCENES. There were the places Naomi had traversed with her husband and her boys; places of rest under the shadow of the rocks, and of refreshment at the wells. Much must there have been, to recall conversations touched with anxiety concerning their future in the land of Moab. So would many places speak to us to-day. There, care gazed at us wistfully, and we remember all the thoughts it suggested. There she heard the tinkling of the bells of the camels, as the little trading cavalcade passed by her. What reminiscences! And they would all remind her of the good hand which had led her on, and never forgotten or forsaken her.

III. RETURN JOURNEYS REMIND US OF LITTLE EPISODES OF LIFE THAT ARE OVER FOR EVER. We cannot in the ordinary course of an unbroken and unshifting home realise the flight of time so well as when we have marked changes, which by their very abruptness divide life into chapters, which, like volumes, have their commencement and close. A new nest has to be built, and new trees have to be sought to build it in. Thus with ordinary observation we may notice how those who have had to seek new homes find the pilgrim-nature of life more marked in their thought than those who are born and brought up and settled through the long years in one home. There is a dreamy sense of continuance unbroken in some lives! "That she might return!" But she would not, could not take all of herself with her. She would leave, as we all do, a memory of character, an influence of good or evil over those who had been associated with her in the foreign land.—W. M. S.

Ver. 8.—*Benedictions.* The Hebrews were fond of benedictions. "The Lord bless thee and keep thee." "And Jacob blessed Joseph, and said, The God which fed me all

my life long unto this day, the angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads." "The Lord bless thee out of Zion." These Scriptures of olden time touch us so tenderly, because they recognise the living hand, the loving heart of God. It is this which will make them never grow old. It is this which makes their inspiration living, and keeps their fountains of consolation open still. We are always meeting and parting, journeying forth and returning home. Our families are broken up, our churches have gates of entrance and departure, and the picture of life is always one of a tent-life. We are pilgrims and strangers, as all our fathers were. The keynote of all that I have to say to you from this text is in that word "kindly." The argument is this. We can understand kindness in the sphere of the human, and rise from that to a prayer for the Divine kindness. No society in any age can be cemented together by force alone. Feudalism, for instance, in olden times, was not all terror. The baron could command his dependents in time of war, as he fed and housed and clothed them in times of peace; but, as the old chroniclers tell us, there was often a rare hospitality, a hearty cheerfulness, a chivalrous affection in the somewhat stern relationship; nor will any political economy of government ever be able to preserve nations in allegiance to each other, or at peace amongst themselves, without the cultivation of Christian brotherhood.

I. THE LORD KNOWS BEST WHAT KINDNESS IS. The Lord deal kindly with you. Has he been kind? that is the question for us all. At times we should have been tempted to answer, No! The vine is blighted, the fig tree withered, the locusts have spoiled the green of spring, the little lambs have died. Kindly? Yes, we shall answer one time when we stand in our lot at the end of days. For kindness is not indulgence. I am thankful that this once common word has dropped out of our prayers—Indulgent Father. No word in the English language describes a feebler state of being than the word indulgence; it refers always to the weaker side of our nature; that which is pleasant to us, that which eases us of pain and of discipline and effort. Prayer like this goes to the heart; more especially from the Naomis of the universe who have had so hard a time of it, to whom life has been so full of bereavement and battle. But if you study life, you will see it is the indulged who complain; it is those nursed in the lap of luxury who whine and whimper if the sun does not shine, if the pomegranate, and the fig, and the grape do not supplement the bread. Indulgence breeds supercilious mannerism and contempt for common things in them; and all seems so very strange if men, and women, and things are not ready for their comfort. God's kindness to us may take forms which surprise us. At the heart of his severest judgments there is mercy, in the bitter spring there is healing water, in the desolated altar there is the downfall of idolatry. Abba, Father, we cry, and he seems not to hear us. The wild winds seem to waft away into empty space our cries for help and pity, but he who sitteth in the heavens hears and answers according to the wisdom of his own will. The kindest things God has ever done for us have been, perhaps, the strangest and severest. So it was with Daniel, and Jacob, and Joseph, and Abraham our father. All God's ways are done in truth, and truth is always kindness, for the music of the universe is set in that key. The throne of the Almighty himself has its firm pillars planted on that. Away we go to business and duty. Farewell to son and daughter. Go thy way, pilgrim of life, with knapsack and staff; henceforth our paths are separate, and for you there will come battles when we cannot fight beside you, burdens we cannot help you to bear. To another hearth you will come at evening, when the day's work is done, and the anodynes of sympathy are needed for the worker's heart. "Go thy way. The Lord deal kindly with thee."

II. THE LORD ALONE WILL BE WITH US ALL THROUGH OUR FUTURE PILGRIMAGE. Apart from Divine power, which we have not to bless with, there is Divine presence which we all need. Christ will be with us to the end. Never will come a battle, a temptation, a solitude, a sorrow, a needful sacrifice, but the Lord will be at hand. The sceptre will never be laid in front of an empty throne. The Lord reigns. It is touching to see the struggles of modern thought in the minds of men who have drifted away from the incarnation and resurrection of our Lord. "The ocean encroaches more and more each year"—to use a figure of one who has marked the "ebb" of thought—"and he watches his fields eaten up from year to year." Yes,

says the same writer, who is depicting the drift:—"The meadow-land, whereon he played in the innocent delights of childhood, has now become a marshy waste of sand. The garden where he gathered flowers, an offering of love and devotion to his parents, is now sown with sea-salt. The church where he offered up his childish prayers, and wondered at the high mysteries of which his teachers spoke, stands tottering upon the edge of a crumbling cliff that the next storm may bring down in ruin." And this is rightly called "an experience of spiritual misery." Pathetic, indeed, is this. The picture is most touching and saddening! Who can feel it more than those who suffer the eclipses of faith? We, who worship here, trust in the living God, who as we believe revealed himself to our fathers by the prophets, and who in these last days has spoken to us by his Son, whom he hath made heir of all things, anath given us this testimony, in that he hath raised him from the dead.—W. M. S.

Ver. 8.—"As you have dealt with the dead and me." This beautiful analogy, which has its root idea in love and home, is very suggestive.

I. THE LORD KNOWS BEST WHAT OTHERS HAVE BEEN TO US. "As you have dealt with the dead and me." You have been good and true to them, Naomi says, with a voice that trembles with remembrances of the old days gone for ever. It is a touching little sentence. The dead. So silent now. Never to come back for us to touch imperfectness into riper good; never to charm away with pleasant thoughts the dull hours; never to fill with deeper meanings of love the half-empty words; never to make more Divine the common service of life; never to put the best interpretation upon conduct; never to lift the leaden crown of care from the anxious brow; never to help to transfigure the mean and lowly with heavenly hopes and aspirations. Gone! What a world of vacancy, and silence, and subtle mystery! Is it strange we should wish well to those who were kind to the dead? And Naomi links her own being with them still. "The dead and me." And with true hearts they never can be disassociated. Anniversaries of remembrance make our separations no more distant. They soften them. They give place for comforting remembrances; but the dead are near as ever. "The dead and me!" Who shall separate? None. Christ died, yea, rather is risen again, and he will raise us up together to the heavenly places. What a blessing so to live, so to fill our place as sons and daughters, so to sweeten, sublime, and sanctify life that others may make our conduct a plea with that God who has known our heart and life, and say, "The Lord deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and me."

II. THE LORD HAS GIVEN US GUARANTEES OF HIS KINDNESS. We are not left to meditate on rain and fruitful seasons only. Not the green of spring, nor the south wind of summer, nor the gold of autumn alone proclaim his goodness. So long as the story of the cross has Divine meaning for us, so long as we believe it, not alone as the spirit of a good man's life, but as the revelation of God manifest in the flesh, so long can we exclaim, "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us." Nor can we exclude conscience from our argument; that, too, is a guarantee that the Almighty cares for us, that he will not let us sin and suffer without the very voice Divine awakening, alarming, and arresting us. None but a good Being would have put conscience there, and made it universal, and filled it with such sweet benedictions for the soul. We are surrounded by evidences of the Eternal pity. God who spared not his own Son, will with him also freely give us all things—for man is still his child, and he has a desire to the work of his hands. When we pray, therefore, "The Lord deal kindly with thee," we only ask him to be like himself, we only put him in remembrance of his promise to hear when we call upon him. Some would think God kind, indeed, if he were less severe on sin; to them all law is baneful, and the sorest evils are only evidences of an imperfect brain, or an untrained mind, or an ungovernable power of impulse. How, then, should the law of God be other than dislikable—nay, detestable to them; but he who prepared the light, prepared also the throne of his judgment, and he will by no means clear the guilty—for the love of God would be but a weak sentiment if it were not harmonised with a law which means order, truth, righteousness, and justice in all domains of his eternal empire. We only predicate that love is the root of law, as it

is also the essence of mercy, and how God's kindness even on the cross shows that justice and mercy blend with each other.

III. THE LORD LOOKS FOR OUR LOVE TO HIM IN OUR LOVE TO EACH OTHER. If we love him we shall feed his lambs, forgive our enemies, and fulfil the whole law of love. How many there have been who, professing even an extreme sanctity, have robbed their partners, deluded their followers, and sometimes darkened for ever a brightly opening life. It is saddening to think what religion has suffered from those whose countenances advertise asperity and contempt, selfishness and pride, whilst they carry their Bibles under their arms, and seem shocked at the exuberance of a healthy joy. Deal kindly? Not they. Their silken words are often the soft sheaths of dagger purposes, and their sham friendship is often only the occasion of stealing mental photographs of you to distribute among their friends. Deal kindly? Why they sleep as well when they have wounded as when they have healed, and they do not understand what the plan of salvation has to do with a conscientious rectitude, a tender consideration, and a warm and loving heart. Deal kindly. Let the Church arise and shine, and put on her beautiful garments. Let the venerable Apostle John take his place once more in the midst of the Churches, and say, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, for God is love." "If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us." "My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and truth." "He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him." How true we feel all this to be, and yet how hard in such a world as this. God is light, God is love, but unless we walk in the light with him we know nothing of it at all. It is still more popular to discuss a mystery than to seek after a Divine ideal. It is still true that many appraise their goodness by their greater enlightenment on some disputable points of religion, and they greatly hope their friend and brother will come to see like themselves. Alas! alas! all the while we may perchance be so untrue to Christ, we may be experiencing no sensitive grief that we are unlike the chief Shepherd of the sheep, so worldly, so captious, so dull in all Divine sensibilities. Naomi's prayer, therefore, may teach us much to-day about God—our Saviour; much, too, about ourselves. This, at all events, is true. If the harvests of love come late, they are very real and very precious. Years alone can reveal character. We know what *others* are in times of test and trial, as Naomi did in a strange land. She was a mother-in-law, and that is a hard part to fulfil, often the subject of satire, too often, indeed, an experience which awakens slender sympathy; she yet gained the crown of trust, and honour, and love. And now, how can she speak better for others than by speaking to God for them? The God who has never left her, the God who has been the husband of the widow, the God who sent her human solace in the trying hours of her bereavement in the far away land. "The Lord deal kindly with you." When once in the hush of death a girl stood at the threshold of the door, trembling, as childhood does, in the presence of death, the mother, bending over the quiet sleeper, beckoned her in. She regained confidence then, and taking up the cold hand kissed it, and said of her dead brother, "Mother, that hand never struck me." How beautiful! Can we say the same, that we never wounded the dead? Can we say it of the Christ himself, that we never crucified the Son of God afresh? And now we look up to the great Father of our spirits, and the God of our salvation, and pray him to bless all we love, to make them his own now and evermore. His kindness is truer, deeper, wiser than our own. "The Lord bless them and keep them." "The Lord deal kindly with them."—W. M. S.

## EXPOSITION.

### CHAPTER I. 15-22.

Ver. 15.—**And she said, Behold, thy sister-in-law is gone back to her people, and to her gods: return thou after thy sister-in-law.** The expression that stands in King James's version thus, "and to her

gods," is rendered by Dr. Cassel "and to her God." The same interpretation, it is noteworthy, is given in the Targum of Jonathan, who renders the expression, "and to her Fear" (וּלְיִרְאָתָהּ). Such a translation assumes that the Moabites were not only theists, but monotheists. And yet

in the mythology, or primitive theology, of Moab, we read both of Baal-Peor and of Chemosh. As to the former, see Num. xxv. 8, 5; Deut. iv. 3; Ps. cvi. 28; Hosea ix. 10. As to the latter, see Judges xi. 24; 1 Kings xi. 7, 33; Jer. xlviii. 7, 13. In Numbers, moreover, xxi. 29, and in Jeremiah xlviii. 46, the Moabites are called the *people of Chemosh*, and frequently is their national god called Chemosh in the inscription of King Mesha on the *Moabitish Stone*, so recently discovered and deciphered. It is supposed, not without reason, that the two names belonged to one deity, Chemosh being the old native name. Nevertheless, the translation "to her god" is an interpretation, not a literal rendering, and, on the other hand, the translation "to her gods" would, on the hypothesis of the monotheism of the Moabites, be unidiomatic. The original expression, "to her Elohim," does not tell anything, and was not intended by Naomi to tell anything, or to hint anything, of a numerical character concerning the object or objects of the Moabitish worship. *It was an expression equally appropriate whether there was, or was not, a plurality of objects worshipped.* It might be liberally rendered, and to her own forms of religious worship. The word *elohim* was a survival of ancient polytheistic theology and worship, when a plurality of powers were held in awe. "For," says Fuller, "the heathen, supposing that the whole world, with all the creatures therein, was too great a diocese to be daily visited by one and the same deity, they therefore assigned sundry gods to several creatures." The time arrived, however, when the great idea flashed into the Hebrew mind, *The Powers are One!* and hence the plural noun, with its subtended conception of unity, became construed with verbs and adjectives in the singular number. It was so construed when applied to the one living God; but it readily retained its original applicability to a plurality of deities, and hence, in such a passage as the one before us, where there is neither adjective nor verb to indicate the number, the word is quite incapable of exact rendering into English. Orpah had returned to her people and her Elohim. Return thou after thy sister-in-law. Are we then to suppose that Naomi desired Ruth to return to her Moabitish faith? Is it with a slight degree of criticism that she referred to Orpah's palinode? Would she desire that Ruth should, in this matter, follow in her sister-in-law's wake? We touch on tender topics. Not unlikely she had all along suspected or seen that Orpah would not have insuperable religious scruples. And not unlikely, too, she would herself be free from narrow religious bigotry, at least to the

extent of dimly admitting that the true worship of the heart could reach the true God, even when offensive names, and forms, and symbolisms were present in the outer courts of the creed. Nevertheless, when she said to Ruth, "Return thou after thy sister-in-law," she no doubt was rather putting her daughter-in-law to a final test, and leading her to thorough self-sifting, than encouraging her to go back to her ancestral forms of worship. "God," says Fuller, "wrestled with Jacob with desire to be conquered; so Naomi no doubt opposed Ruth, hoping and wishing that she herself might be foiled."

Ver. 16.—**And Ruth said, Insist not on me forsaking thee: for whither thou goest, I will go.** Ruth's mind was made up. Her heart would not be wrenched away from her mother-in-law. The length of the journey, its dangers, and the inevitable fatigue accompanying it, moved not, by so much as a jot, her resolution. Had not her mother-in-law the same distance to travel, the same fatigue to endure, the same perils to encounter? Might not the aged traveller, moreover, derive some assistance and cheer from the company of a young, ready-handed, and willing-hearted companion? She was resolved. Nothing on earth would separate them. **Wheresoever thou lodgest, I will lodge.** A better version than Luther's, "Where thou stayest, I will stay" (*wo du bleibest, da bleibe ich auch*). The reference is not to the ultimate destination, but to the nightly halts.  $\text{לָּיְלָה}$  is the verb employed; and it is rendered "to tarry all night" in Gen. xxiv. 54; xxviii. 11; xxxi. 54; Judges xix. 6, &c. It is the Latin *pernoctare* and the German *übernachten*, the former being the rendering of the Vulgate, and the latter the translation in the *Berlenburger Bibel*. **Thy people (is) my people, and thy God my God.** There being no verb in the original, it is well to supply the simplest copula. Ruth claims, as it were, Naomi's people and Naomi's God as her own already.

Ver. 17.—**Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried.** She wished to be naturalised for life in Naomi's fatherland. Nor did she wish her remains to be conveyed back for burial to the land of her nativity. **So may Yahveh do to me, and still more, but death only shall part me and thee.** She appeals to the God of the Israelites, the one universal God. She puts herself on oath, and invokes his severest penal displeasure if she should suffer anything less uncontrollable than death to part her from her mother-in-law. "So may Yahveh do to me." It was thus that the Hebrews made their most awful appeals to Yahveh. They signified their willingness to suffer some dire calamity if they should either do the

evil deed repudiated or fail to do the good deed promised. So stands in misty indefiniteness; not, as Fuller supposes, by way of "leaving it to the discretion of God Almighty to choose that arrow out of his quiver which he shall think it most fit to shoot," but as a kind of euphemism, or cloudy veil, two-thirds concealing, and one-third revealing, whatever horrid inflection could by dramatic sign be represented or hinted. *And still more*—a thoroughly Semitic idiom, and so may he add (*to do*)! There was first of all a full imprecation, and then an additional 'bittock,' to lend intensity to the asseveration. "But death only shall sever between me and thee!" Ruth's language is broken. Two formulas of imprecation are flung together. One, if complete, would have been to this effect: "So may Yahveh do to me, and so may he add to do, 'if' (DN) aught but death sever between me and thee!" The other, if complete, would have run thus: "I swear by Yahveh 'that' (P) death, death only, shall part thee and me!" In the original the word *death* has the article, *death emphatically*. It is as if she had said *death, the great divider*. The full idea is in substance *death alone*. This divider alone, says Ruth, "shall sever between me and thee;" literally, "between me and between thee," a Hebrew idiom, repeating for emphasis' sake the two-sided relationship, but taking the repetition in reverse order, *between me (and thee) and between thee (and me)*.

Ver. 18.—*And she perceived*. In our idiom we should have introduced the proper name, "And Naomi perceived." *That she was determined to go with her*. She saw that Ruth was fixed in her resolution. *And she left off speaking to her*. She "gave in" Ruth, as Fuller has it, was "a fixed star."

Ver. 19.—*And they two went*—they trudged along, the two of them—until they came to Bethlehem. In the expression "the two of them" the masculine pronoun (DN for P) occurs, as in verses 8 and 9. It mirrors in language the actual facts of relationship in life. The masculine is sometimes assumptively representative of both itself and the feminine. And sometimes, even apart from the representative element, it is the overlapping and overbearing gender. *And it came to pass, as they entered Bethlehem, that the whole city got into commotion concerning them, and they said, Is this Naomi?* Naomi, though greatly altered in appearance, besides being travel-worn and weary, was recognised. But who was that pensive and beautiful companion by her side? Where was Elimelech? Where was Machlon and Chilion? Why are they not with their mother? Such would be some of the

questions started, and keenly talked about and discussed. Then on both the wayfarers the finger-marks of poverty, involuntary signals of distress, would be unconcealable. Interest, sympathy, gossip would be alive throughout the little town, especially among the female portion of the population, and loud would be their exclamations of surprise. The verb *they said* is feminine in Hebrew, נִשְׁמְעוּ, a nicety which cannot be reproduced in English without obtruding too prominently the sex referred to, as in Michaelis's version—"and all the women said." So the Vulgate. The verb which we have rendered *got into commotion* is found in 1 Sam. iv. 6—"the earth rang again;" and in 1 Kings i. 45—"the city rang again."

Ver. 20.—*And she said to them, Call me not Naomi, call me Mara: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me*. Salutations were respectfully addressed to her as she walked along in quest of some humble abode. And when thus spoken to by the sympathetic townspeople, she was called, of course, by her old *sweet* name. But as it fell in its own rich music on her ears, its original import flashed vividly upon her mind. Her heart "filled" at the contrast which her circumstances represented, and she said, "Address me not as Naomi, call not to me (P) Naomi: address me as Mara,"—that is, *bitter*,—"for the Almighty has caused bitterness to me exceedingly" (see on ver. 2).

*The Almighty*, or אֱלֹהִים, an ancient polytheistic name that had at length—like אֱלֹהִים and אֱלֹהִים—been reclaimed in all its fullness for the one living and true God. It had become a thorough proper name, and hence it is used without the article. In the Septuagint it is sometimes rendered, as here, *ὁ ἰσχυρός, the Sufficient*; in Job, where it frequently occurs, *ὁ παντοκράτωρ, the Omnipotent*. But it is one of those peculiar nouns that never can be fully reproduced in any Aryan language. Naomi's theology, as indicated in the expression, "the Almighty hath caused bitterness to me exceedingly," need not be to its minutest jot endorsed. God was not the only agent with whom she had had to do. Much of the bitterness of her lot may have been attributable to her husband or to herself, and perhaps to forefathers and foremothers. It is not fair to ascribe all the embittering element of things to God. Much rather might the sweetness, which had so often relieved the bitterness, be traced to the hand of him who is "the Lord God, merciful and gracious, abundant in goodness."

Ver. 21.—*I went forth full, and Yahveh has caused me to return in emptiness. Why should you call me Naomi, and Yahveh has*

testified against me, and the Almighty has brought evil upon me? She went forth "full," with husband and sons, not to speak of goods. She was under the necessity of returning in emptiness, or with empty hands. The Hebrew word *ḏāḇār* does not exactly mean *empty*, as it is rendered in the Septuagint, the Vulgate, and King James's version. It is not an adjective, but an adverb, *emptily*. This lamentable change of circumstances she attributed to the action of Yahveh. He had, she believed, been testifying against her by means of the trials through which she had passed. She was right in a certain conditional acceptance of her language; but only on condition of that condition. And, let us condition her declarations as we may, she was probably in danger of making the same mistake concerning herself and her trials which was made by Job's comforters in reference to the calamities by which he was overwhelmed. In so far as *penal evil* is concerned, it may be traced directly or circuitously to the will and government of God. "Shall there be evil—that is, penal evil—in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?" (Amos iii. 6). But there are many sufferings that are not penal. The evil that is penal is only one segment of physical evil; and then there is besides, metaphysical evil, or the evil that consists in the inevitable imperfection of finite being. It is noteworthy that the

participle of the Hiphilic verb *עָלָה* employed by Naomi is always translated in King James's version *evil doer*, or *wicked doer*, or *evil*, or *wicked*. Naomi, in using such a term, and applying it to Yahveh, was walking on a theological precipice, where it is not needful that we should accompany her. Instead of the literal expression, 'and' *Yahveh*, we may, with our English wealth of conjunctions freely say, 'when' *Yahveh*. There is a charm in the original simplicity. There is likewise a charm in the more complex structure of the free translation.

Ver. 22.—**So Naomi returned.** The narrator pauses to recapitulate his narrative of the return, and hence the recapitulatory *so* is, in English, very much to be preferred to the merely additive *and* of the original. **And Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter-in-law, with her, who returned out of the land of Moab.** The cumulative and apparently redundant expression, "who returned out of the land of Moab," is remarkable at once for its simplicity and for its inexactitude. Ruth, strictly speaking, had not returned, but she took part in Naomi's return. **And they arrived in Bethlehem at the commencement of barley-harvest.** Barley ripened before wheat, and began to be reaped sometimes as early as March, but generally in April, or Abib. By the time that the barley-harvest was finished the wheat crop would be ready for the sickle.

### HOMILETICS.

Vers. 15—22.—**Devoted attachment.** I. Ruth was fixed in her desire and determination to CAST IN HER LOT WITH HER DESOLATE AND DESTITUTE MOTHER-IN-LAW. The absolute unselfishness of this determination is noteworthy, for—1. Be it noted that Naomi was not one of those who are always murmuring and complaining because they do not receive sufficient consideration. 2. Still less did she claim as a right, or urge as a duty, that her daughter-in-law should become her companion in travel, and wait upon her as an attendant. 3. On the contrary, she was careful to put Ruth in an attitude of entire freedom, so that, if she had a secret wish to go back to her Moabitish friends, she could have gratified her desire without laying herself open to the imputation of coldness or ingratitude. 4. Ruth was tested nevertheless, as all of us in our respective relations have either already been or will be. Eve, for instance, was emphatically tested. So was Adam. Abraham too. Joseph also. Very particularly the second Adam, our Lord Jesus Christ, when he was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness. Judas was tested when the demon of cupidity entered into his heart. So was Peter when he stood warming himself at the fire in the court of the high priest's palace. All who are *tried* are tested. And all men without exception have to endure *trial* and *trials*. It was as regards the strength of her attachment to her mother-in-law that Ruth was tested. Not only did Naomi hold out no hopes of home-comfort in Judah, she expressly said, dissuasively, when Orpah had gone back, "Behold, thy sister-in-law has gone back to her people, and to her Elohim: return thou after thy sister-in-law" (ver. 15). 5. Ruth stood the test. Not so did Eve. Not so Adam. But Abraham stood it. So Joseph. Emphatically did Jesus stand it, so that he knows how to succour those who are tempted. Judas did not stand the test. Nor at first did Peter, though afterwards he repented, and, when reconverted, was able to strengthen his brethren. Ruth, for love to Naomi, was



able to say in her heart, "Farewell, Melchom! Farewell, Chemosh! Farewell, Moab! Welcome, Israel! Welcome, Canaan! Welcome, Bethlehem!" (Fuller). 6. She witnessed a good and most noble confession of love and devotedness (see vers. 16, 17). She said, "Insist not on me forsaking thee; for whither thou goest, I will go; wheresoever thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people is my people, and thy God my God: where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried. So may Yahveh do to me, and still more, if aught but death part thee and me." "Nothing," says Matthew Henry, "could be said more fine, more brave." "Truly," says Dr. Kitto, "the simple eloquence of the mouth that speaks out of the abundance of the heart never found more beautiful and touching expression than in these words of this young widow" ('Daily Bible-Illustrations'). "Her vow," says S. Cox, "has stamped itself on the very heart of the world; and that not because of the beauty of its form simply, though even in our English version it sounds like a sweet and noble music, but because it expresses in a worthy form, and once for all, the utter devotion of a genuine and self-conquering love. It is the spirit which informs and breathes through these melodious words that make them so precious to us, and that also renders it impossible to utter any fitting comment on them" ('Book of Ruth,' pp. 72, 73). Be it borne in mind that something of the same enthusiasm of love, that dwelt in the heart of Ruth, should be found in *the centre of every home*. Wheresoever a heart is swayed and dominated by the might and mastery of a great affection, the entire character becomes clothed with mingled dignity and beauty.

II. THE ENTRY OF THE TWO WIDOWS INTO BETHLEHEM. There was no more talk, no more thought, of turning back. The hearts of the two widows were locked together for ever. Hence they travelled on from stage to stage, until, worn and wearied, they entered Bethlehem. 1. Note the effect on the citizens, especially the female portion of them (see ver. 19). Naomi, passing along through the streets, was recognised. The news flew from individual to individual, from house to house, from lane to lane. There was a running to and fro of excited mothers and maidens. All were eager to see the returned emigrant, and her pensive Moabitish companion. Her old acquaintances, in particular, when they had seen and identified her, broke up into groups, and talked, and said, Is that Naomi? That, Naomi! Is this Naomi? This, Naomi! "So unlike is the rose when it is withered to what it was when it was blooming." 2. Note the effect on Naomi herself. As she looked on old scenes, and witnessed the excitement and commotion of old neighbours and acquaintances, her heart felt overwhelmed within her, and she said to the sympathising friends who clustered around her, "Call me not Naomi, call me Mara: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me" (see vers. 20, 21). But it surely will be permitted to us not only to mingle our tears with those of the afflicted widow, but likewise to pause reverently ere we unreservedly accept or endorse her attribution of all her trials and woes to the hand and heart of the Lord. It should nevertheless be borne in mind that even those trials that come most directly from men's own acts or choices come to pass by the permission of the Almighty, and are so overruled by him that they will be made to work for good to them who love him (Rom. viii. 28).

### HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 16—18.—*Constancy*. For simple pathos and unstudied eloquence, this language is unsurpassed. "One touch of nature makes the whole world kin." Here is the fervent outpouring of a true heart. Love and resolution are at their height. Thousands of human souls have expressed their mutual attachment in these words. They are not words of extravagance or of passion, but of feeling, of principle, of a fixed and changeless mind. Constancy must be admired, even by the inconstant.

I. THERE WERE INFLUENCES OPPOSED TO RUTH'S CONSTANCY. 1. Early associations and friendships would have tied her to Moab. 2. The entreaty of Naomi that she would return set her perfectly free to do so, if she had been disposed. 3. The example of her sister-in-law, Orpah, could not but have some weight. Orpah had been, like Ruth, kind alike to the living and the dead, yet she wept, kissed her mother-in-law, and returned. 4. The religion of her childhood could scarcely have been

without attractions for her. Could she leave the temples, the deities, the observances of her earliest days behind?

II. THERE WERE MANIFESTATIONS OF PIOUS CONSTANCY IN RUTH'S RESOLVES. 1. She would go with Naomi, though by an unknown route. 2. She would dwell with Naomi, though in an unknown home. 3. She would die with Naomi, though to be buried in an unknown grave.

III. THERE WAS A RELIGIOUS FOUNDATION FOR RUTH'S CONSTANCY. 1. Apparent from the resolution—"Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God." 2. Apparent from the adjuration she employed—"The Lord do so," &c.

IV. THE TRIUMPH AND RECOMPENSE OF RUTH'S CONSTANCY. 1. Her fidelity and devotion were reciprocated by Naomi. 2. In the providence of God Ruth was rewarded by an honourable position and a happy life.—T.

Vers. 19—21.—*Heart wounds reopened.* Return after long absence to scenes of youth always affecting; he who returns is changed; they who receive him are changed too. Observe the reception which Naomi met from her former neighbours at Bethlehem. Their question, "Is this Naomi?" evinces—1. Surprise. She is living! We see her again! Yet how is she changed! 2. Interest. How varied has been her experience whilst absent! And she loves Bethlehem so that she returns to it in her sorrow! 3. Compassion. "All the city was moved about them." How could those who remembered her fail to be affected by the calamities she had passed through? Consider the sentiments expressed by Naomi upon her return.

I. HER GRIEF WAS NATURAL AND BLAMELESS. "I went out full," *i. e.* in health, in youth, with some earthly property; above all, with husband and sons. "The Lord hath brought me home again empty," *i. e.* aged, broken down in health and spirits, poor, without kindred or supporters. "Call me not Naomi," *i. e.* pleasant; "call me Mara," *i. e.* bitter. Her lot was sad. Religion does not question the fact of human trouble and sorrow. And she was not wrong in feeling, in the circumstances, the peculiar pressure of grief and distress. We remember that "Jesus wept."

II. HER RECOGNITION OF GOD'S PROVIDENCE WAS RIGHT; WAS A SIGN OF PIETY. She attributes all to the Almighty, to the Lord. Observe that in two verses this acknowledgment is made four times. In a world over which God rules we should acknowledge his presence and reign in all human experience. If trouble comes to us by means of natural laws, those laws are ordered by his wisdom. If by human agency, that agency is the result of the constitution with which he has endowed man. If as the result of our own action, he connects actions with their consequences. Therefore, let us reverently recognise his hand in all that happens to us!

III. HER INTERPRETATION OF GOD'S PROVIDENCE WAS MISTAKEN. "The Lord," said Naomi, "hath testified against me." Men frequently imagine that if God could prevent afflictions, and yet permits them, he cannot regard the afflicted in a favourable and friendly light. But this is not so. "Whom he loveth he chasteneth." The Book of Job warns us against misunderstanding the meaning of calamity. Christ has also warned us against supposing that Divine anger is the explanation of human griefs and sufferings. "All things work together for good unto those who love God." How often is it true, as the poet Cowper knew and sang—

"Behind a frowning providence  
God hides a smiling face!"

T.

Vers. 16, 17.—"Entreat me not to leave thee." A mother and a daughter-in-law are to go together. The daughter wishes it, and petitions with most eloquent ardour that it shall be so. A mother-in-law is sometimes—alas, too often—the subject of criticism and satire. It is a difficult position to fill, and many bitterly unkind and untrue caricatures have been made upon the relationship. In this case Naomi had made herself beloved by both Orpah and Ruth, and it was only through Naomi's words, "Turn again," that Orpah went back; for they had both said, "Surely we will return with thee unto thy people." Ruth, however, remained firm, and her fidelity has made these words quickening to many undecided souls.

I. ENTREATY MAY PROVE TOO EARNEST. "Entreat me not." It is the language of

a heart that feels what limits there are to the power of resistance within us. Test may turn in unwise hands into overpowering temptation. Naomi knew where to stop, and Ruth remains to us a picture of heroic devotion. Orpah failed in courage, but was not destitute of affection, for her farewell is accompanied with a kiss of love. In her character we see impulse without strength. But "Ruth clave unto her." And it was no light sacrifice to leave fatherland and home. We can hardly call the test at first a religious one, for it is evident that Ruth's love for her mother-in-law was the immediate occasion of her cleaving to her, and leaving the Moabitish gods. In time, doubtless, her nominal faith turned into a living heritage.

II. LOVE CREATES THE FINEST ELOQUENCE. There is no utterance in the Old Testament more pathetic and melodious than these words. They are idyllic in their eloquence. There is nothing stilted or artificial in them, and they have in them a rhythm of melody which is more beautiful than a mere rhyme of words. Courage and sacrifice, love and devotion, breathe all through them. They condense too all that is prophetic of coming experience—the lodging and the loneliness, the weary pilgrimage and the grave in a foreign land. The mind cannot frame sentences like these without the glow of a sincere and sacrificial heart. We feel as we read them what grandeur there is in human nature when love evokes all its depth of power. It is not a skilful touch that can do this, but a soul alive to the calls of love and duty.

III. NO TRUE LIFE WAS EVER LIVED IN VAIN. It was what Naomi had been to her, what she was in herself, that made this sacrifice possible. Love creates love. The charm of friendship may be merely intellectual, and then, after the feast of reason, all is over. But Naomi's character was rooted in religion. She did not carry the mere roll of the prophets in her hand; she carried the spirit of the Holy Book in her heart. Ruth had never been in synagogue or temple; she had listened to no Rabbi, and never sat at the feet of the doctors; but as "the earliest piety is mother's love," so the character of a true mother is a stem around which the tendrils of the young heart climb to the mother's God. None of us liveth to himself. And so from the flower of piety, the seed drops into other hearts, and brings forth fruit after many days.—W. M. S.

Ver. 18.—*Moral steadfastness.* "When she saw that she was steadfastly minded." "Then she left speaking." The test had done a true work, and we see the heroine who could stand fast. Yes; "having done all, to stand," is something in the great emergencies and temptations of life. There are times when to stand in the rush of the stream, as the river breaks into spray around us, is as much for the hour as we can do, and God knows and honours that.

I. THE STEADFAST MIND GIVES THE STEADFAST STEP. A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways. Veering here and there like the wind, there is no dependence on the direction he may take. The man or the woman is made by something within them invisible to the world. When Christ was led as a lamb to the slaughter, the great conflict had been fought out in Gethsemane, and then the steps were calm and steadfast. What an hour is that in which, in common parlance, "the mind is made up," the resolution taken. This is firmness, as opposed to obstinacy, which acts without reasons, and often in the teeth of them. The misery caused in this world by obstinate people is to be seen sometimes in the home, where sulkiness of temper makes the lives of others miserable. Firmness is the result of the thoughtful decision of an enlightened mind and a consecrated heart.

II. THE STEADFAST MIND MAKES THE BEST COMPANION. Ruth was ready for the companion journey back to Bethlehem. And in all our life journeys nothing is so precious as a steadfast heart. There are times of misinterpretation in all lives—times of disheartenment, times of shadow and darkness. In such hours a steadfast companion is God's richest gift to us. What consolation it is to know that even humanly every support will not give way, that there will always be one eye to brighten, one hand to help, one heart to love, one mind to appreciate. The fickle and irresolute may have a transient beauty and a winning manner, but these are poor endowments without a steadfast mind.

III. THE STEADFAST MIND IS FREED FROM THE INFINITY OF LESSER WORRIES.

It is made up. It is not open to every solicitation. It is negative to doubt and distrust. This is the *right* way, and nought can move it. The feeble and irresolute have a restless life. They are constantly balancing expediences and advantages. Christ our Divine Lord set his face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem. The hardest journey of all to the shame and spitting, the awful darkness and the cruel cross. If we are firm and decided in our purposes we shall not be wasting either time or strength upon the solicitations of the popular or profitable. A voice within will say, "This is the way, walk ye in it."—W. M. S.

Ver. 19.—"So they two went till they came to Bethlehem." "They two!" Sometimes it is husband and wife. Sometimes it is two sisters commencing life together in the great city where they have to earn their bread. Sometimes it is two lovers who have large affection and little means, and who have to wait and work and hope on. Sometimes it is widow and child. "They two!" What unrecorded histories of heroism there are written in God's book all unknown to us.

I. HERE IS THE COMMENCEMENT AND CLOSE OF A PILGRIMAGE. They went. They came. So is it of the life history itself. All is enfolded in these brief words. What a multitude of figures in Scripture suggest the brevity of life. A tale that is told. A post. A weaver's shuttle. The morning flower. So indeed it is. What a multitude of incidents would be included even in this brief journey of Naomi's; but these are the two clasps of the volume of life. They went. They came. "Every beginning holds in it the end, as the acorn does the oak."

II. HERE IS THE SIGHT OF A CITY. Bethlehem. Cities with them were not like cities with us. Even Bethlehem was called a city. But the old dwelling-places, after ten years, have a mute eloquence about them. Other feet come to the well. Little children who gathered flowers on the wild hills are now bearing pitchers to the well. But after a weary journey how refreshing to the Easterns was the glimpse of the white houses on the hills. We look for a city. A city which hath foundations. A city where our beloved are; for God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. We do not think of it in health and strength and excitement of human interest, but one day we shall look with quiet longing for the city gates. The evening of life will come upon us, and we shall pray, "Let me go, for the day breaketh."

III. HERE IS A PILGRIMAGE ENDED. Better is the end of a thing than the beginning, said the wise man. And so it is. "I have finished my course." How much is included in that. When the battered ship comes into harbour we take more interest in her than the spick and span new vessel with trim decks, and untorn sails, and scarless masts. When the battle is over we think more of the shot-pierced flag than of the new banner borne out by the troops with martial music. We like to see the pilgrim start. But some pilgrims turn back. We like to *hear* Ruth's resolve. How much better is it to *see* the resolve written in letters of living history. We can call no man hero, no woman heroine, till the march is over and the victory won.—W. M. S.

Ver. 19.—Never seemed there a sadder contrast. Naomi left Bethlehem in the full bloom of womanhood, with a husband and two sons. Elimelech, her husband, died, we read, "and she was left and her two sons." They took them wives, and, as mothers do, she lived in the hopes and honours of their new homes; but, after dwelling in Moab about ten years, we read Mahlon and Chilion died also, both of them, and the woman was left of her two sons and her husband. A strange land is not so strange when we carry home with us; but it is strange when all that made home *home*, is gone. We need not wonder, therefore, that not alone for the bread of harvest, but for the bread of love, she and her daughters-in-law "went on the way to *return* to the land of Judah." But, with a fine instinct, Naomi felt that what would be home again for her would be an alien land to them; and the tender narrative tells us how she suggested they should remain, and find rest, each of them, in the place of their people. We well know the sequel to the words of Naomi, "Turn again my daughters;" for Ruth has become with us all a beautiful picture of true-hearted womanhood, and a very household name. But it is with the question, "Is this Naomi?" that we now have to deal. She went out full. Not wealthy, perhaps, —though love is always wealthy, for it alone gives that which worlds want wealth

to buy. She is coming home "empty," as many have done since Naomi did, in all the generations. Bent, and sad, and grey, her worn dress tells of her poverty, her garb bespeaks the widow. All in a few years; all crowded into these few opening verses. The pathway of the past is an avenue now, along which she looks to the opening days, when the light flooded her steps, and she walked in the warm glow of companionship and love. Is this Naomi? And have not *we* had this to say again and again concerning those whose early days we knew? There we heard the merry shout of children, and there we saw manhood in its strength and prime. Naomi it cannot be: *that* the face we knew as a bride and as a mother! Never! Yet so it is. They went out full and came home empty. Yet not empty, if, like Naomi, they keep their fellowship with God.

I. NAOMI IS A RETURNING PILGRIM. Home has been but a tent life, and the curtains have been rent by sorrow and death. She tells us the old, old story. *Here* have we no continuing city. Beautiful was the land to which she returned, and in that dear land of promise there never was a fairer time than barley-harvest. Many and many a harvest-time had come and gone since Naomi went forth, and many a reaper's song was silent evermore. As she passed the vines and the oleanders fringing the broad fields, bronzed and bright-eyed faces were directed towards her; and here, in the distance, was Bethlehem, its little white houses dotting the green slopes, its well by the wayside. Bethlehem—home! Oh! that strange longing to live through the closing years in the country places where we were born! It is a common instinct. The Chinese have it, and will be buried nowhere else. It is a beautiful instinct too—to look with the reverent eyes of age on the tomb-stones we used to spell out in the village, to hear the old rush of the river, the old murmur of the sea. Strange thoughts fill this woman's mind, as the old picture is there with a new peopling of forms and faces. Yet not *all* new. The workers turn to the passing figure, and a gleam of recognition, doubtful at first, lights up their eyes. And then the word passes from one to the other, Is this Naomi? It is the same world in which we live to-day. There is also something to remind us that we are pilgrims and strangers, that unresting time will not wait one hour for us. The unseen angels hurry us on through love and grief and death. Happy for us if we say *plainly* that we seek a country, for the only escape from the *ennui* of life is the satisfaction of the immortal thirst within us by the gospel revelation of eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

II. NAOMI IS A GODLY PILGRIM. Travel-worn and weary, with sandaled feet, she is coming to a city sanctified by the faith of her fathers. She had lived in a heathen country so devoutly, that Ruth could say, "Thy God shall be my God"—a beautiful testimony to Naomi's fidelity, to her victory over idolatrous usages, to her own personal influence over others. Thy God! How serious the eye, how sober the mien, of this woman as she comes into the city. She has had a battle of life to fight, and she has fought it well. How brave and noble and faithful a woman she is! Is this Naomi? If there is not so much of what the world calls beauty in her face, there is character there, experience there. The young Christian starting on his pilgrimage is cheerful enough. His armour is bright and new, his enthusiasm is fresh and keen. He goes forth full of enterprise and hope. Do not be surprised if in the after years you ask, Is this Naomi? How careful, how anxious, how dependent on God alone! What bright visions once filled his soul, how ready he was to criticise Christian character, how determined and unflinching he looked! Well, it *was* a noble promise, and where would the world be without the enthusiasm of youth? Be not surprised now if he looks worn and weary. He has had battles to fight that the world knows not of. He has made strange discoveries in the continent of his own heart; he has been well-nigh overcome, and casting himself entirely on his Lord, he says, "By the grace of God I am what I am." Look at that weary heart. Is that Luther? Look at that faithless spirit. Is that Peter? Look at that worn soldier. Is that Paul? But the Lord is with them! Empty, indeed, in a human sense was Naomi. Call me not Naomi, she said; it has lost its meaning. Life is no longer pleasant. Call me Mara, for life is bitter. True-hearted soul! She knew that it was bitter, indeed, though it was God's will; "for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me." Very bitterly! And are we to cover over that? Can we sing—

'Thy will is sweetest to me when  
It triumphs at my cost'?

We may *sing* it; but it is hard to *live* it. It is glorious to believe in God at such times at all, and to bow with the pain all through our hearts, and to say, "*My God*."—W. M. S.

Ver. 22; ii. 1-3.—Naomi's history may now be carried on in the light of these texts.

I. NAOMI IS AN ANCESTRAL PILGRIM. Ancestor of whom? Turn to Matt. i. 5, and you will find in the genealogy of our Lord the name of Ruth. The earlier part of that Divine life, how fresh and beautiful it is—the advent, the angels, the shepherds' songs! The mother, the first visit to the temple, the doctors! And beautiful ministry too. Power wedded to mercy, miracles of healing, mighty deeds of love, sermons amid the mountains and the cities. True! But stand here a moment. It is an *early* evening of life, I admit; but it *is* evening. Do you see in the blue distance One coming from the judgment hall? Do you hear the wild cry of the mob, "Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him! Crucify him!"? Do you mark the crush of the crowd round one fallen form, who fainted beneath the burden of that cross which he bore for us all? Follow him on to the slopes, while Simon, the Cyrenian, helps to bear his cross. The soldiers mock him. The crowd insult him. They spat upon him, they smote him with their hands, they buffeted him. And now his hands and feet are nailed; his pale face is bowed. Come nearer and gaze. Behold the man! As the reapers asked, "Is this Naomi?" so we ask, "Is this Jesus?" Is this he whose sweet face lay in the manger? Is this he whose bright inquisitive face was in the temple? Is this he who passed the angels at heaven's high gate, and *came* to earth, saying, "Lo! I come to do thy will, O God." Yes! Bowed, bruised, broken for us. The same Saviour, who now endures the cross, despising the shame. Well may we wonder and adore! He saved others, himself he cannot—will not—save! More beautiful now than in the stainless infancy of the Holy Child. More beautiful now than when by the shores of Galilee's lake, he spake words which mirrored heaven more purely and clearly than those waters the gold and crimson of the sky. It is the bowed, broken, forsaken, suffering, dying Lord that moves the world's heart. He knew it all! In that hour, when his soul was made an offering for sin, he, being lifted up, had power to draw all hearts unto him. Is this Naomi? Well might angels ask, Is this the eternal Son of the Father? Is this he of whom the Almighty said, "He is my fellow." Is this he to whom command was given, Let all the angels of God worship him? Yes! It is he. It is finished. "Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of glory shall come in."

II. NAOMI IS A PROVIDED-FOR PILGRIM. Back to Bethlehem; but how to live? how to find the roof-tree that should shelter again? She knew the Eternal's name, "Jehovah-Jireh," the Lord will provide. A kinsman of her husband's, a mighty man of wealth, lived there: of the family of Elimelech; his name was Boaz. We must not mind criticism when we talk of chance, or happening. The Bible does. It is simply one way of stating what seems to us accidental; although in reality we know that the least secrets are in the good hand of him "to whom is nothing trivial." Ruth wants to glean! And Naomi says, Go, my daughter; "and her *hap*—her chance—was to light on the part of a field belonging unto Boaz." We know that the same old love story, which is new in every generation begins again; so Boaz took Ruth, and she was his wife. So that a new home begins, and a smile plays through the tears of the lonely widow. Naomi has some human light again in her landscape; she will see the children's children, and take them by the hand into the coming barley-harvests; she will have some appropriate hopes and joys and interests still. Life to her will not be desolate, because she has still a God above her and a world around her to call forth interest and hope. Her sorrow was not greater than she could bear, and the summer over, even autumn had its tender beauties before life's winter came. So it ever is. Trust in the Lord, and you shall never want any good thing. Believe still in your Saviour, and provided for you will be with

all weapons of fence, all means of consolation, all prosperity that shall not harm your soul. So *true*, then, is the Bible to the real facts of human life. It is not a book of gaiety, for life is real and earnest, and its associations are mortal and mutable. It consecrates home joy, and yet reminds us that every garden has its grave, every dear union its separation. But, on the other hand, there are no utterances of unbearable grief, or unmitigated woe. It says ever to us, Jehovah-Jireh, the Lord will provide. And the facts of experience in every age endorse its truth. As the snows hide flowers even in the Alps, so beneath all our separations and sorrows there are still plants of the Lord, peace, and hope, and joy, and rest in him. Blessed, indeed, shall we be if we can rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him. We, too, shall all change. Time and sorrow will write their experiences on our brow. There will be hours in which we feel like Naomi, empty, oh! so empty. The cup of affection poured out on the ground, the forest without its songsters, the garden without its flowers, the home without its familiar faces. We shall see these pictures every day, and wonder, more and more, how any hearts can do without a Brother and a Saviour in Jesus Christ. But if character be enriched and trained, all is well; for this very end have we had Divine discipline, and the Lord will perfect that which concerneth us for the highest ends of eternal life in him. The baptism with which our Lord was baptised changed his face, altered his mien, enlarged even his Divine experience. He was made "perfect through suffering," and became the Author of eternal salvation to all who trust in him. Coming back even to Bethlehem is only for a season. As Naomi returns, nature alone remains the same; the blue roller-bird would flash for a moment across her path, the music of the turtle-dove remind her of the melody of nature in her childhood;—the peasant garb would tell her of the old unchanged ways; and the line of hills against the sky would remind her that the earth abideth for ever. But for her there was a still more abiding country, where Elimelech, like Abraham, lived, and where Mahlon and Chilion waited for the familiar face that had made their boyhood blessed. And so we wait. The redemption we celebrate here is a passover, a memorial of deliverance and a prophecy of home. Home where sorrow and sighing, night and death, will flee away; where, no longer pilgrims, we shall no more go out, and where the worn face and the weary heart shall be transfigured into the immortal life.—W. M. S.

Ver. 21. "I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty." It seemed, indeed, a *via dolorosa*, this path homeward. How expressive the words.

I. LOVE MAKES LIFE FULL. Why, I thought they went out poor? Yes. Seeking bread? Yes. Yet Naomi's description is true and beautiful. We are "full" when we have that which makes home, home indeed, and we are poor if, having all wealth of means, we have not love. Well, indeed, has it been said that "the golden moments in the stream of life rush past us, and we see nothing but sand; the angels come to visit us, and we only know them when they are gone." We never know how empty life is till the loved are lost to us.

II. THE LORD IS THE DISPOSER OF ALL EVENTS. "The Lord hath brought me home." We talk of Providence when all goes well with us, when the harvests are ripened, and the fruits hang on the wall. But we must not limit Providence to the pleasant. The Lord "takes away" as well as gives. It is said that, in the order of reading at the family altar, when the late John Angell James was about to conduct worship after a severe bereavement, the Psalm to be read was the hundred and third. The good man stopped, tears rolled down his face; and then, gathering up his strength, he said, "Why not? It is the Father!" and he read on, "Bless the Lord, O my soul!"

III. THE FULLEST HOME MAY SOON BE EMPTIED. Yes! We too should feel it so. A husband and two sons gone! What converse there had been! what interest in each other's pursuits! what affectionate concern for each other's weal and happiness! and what a wealth of love for Naomi, the centre of all! We feel at such seasons that death would be blessed relief for us. The thought comes across us, "I have got to live;" to live on from day to day, attending to the minutiae of duty, and coming here and there so often on the little relics of the dead. Home again! That has music in

it for the school-children, who come back to the bright home; but to the widow, oh, how different! Home again, but how empty! Yet we may learn, even from Naomi, that rest and refreshment come to hearts that trust in God their Saviour; and we may learn too what mistakes we make. Naomi said, "Why call ye me Naomi, seeing that the Lord hath testified against me?" Natural enough; but life was still to have a pleasant side for her.—W. M. S.

## EXPOSITION.

## CHAPTER II. 1-9.

It is by way of introduction to the remaining narrative that the writer says—

Ver. 1.—**And Naomi had, on her husband's side, a friend.** The C'tib reading מִיָּדָהּ (absolute מִיָּדָהּ) is much to be preferred to the K'ri מִיָּדָהּ. But מִיָּדָהּ is ambiguous in import. It primarily means *known, well-known, acquainted, an acquaintance* (see Job xix. 14; Ps. lv. 13; lxxxviii. 8, 18). But as intimate acquaintances, especially in a primitive and comparatively unwelded state of society, are generally found within the circle of kinsfolk, the word may be used, and is here used, in reference to a *kinsman*. The Vulgate translates it *consanguineus*. The translation is interpretatively correct; but the original term is less definite, and hence, in virtue of the ambiguity, there is not absolute redundancy in the appended clause, *of the family or clan of Elimelech*. This friend of Naomi on her husband's side is said, in King James's version, to be a **mighty man of wealth**. But the expression so rendered has, in the very numerous passages in which it occurs, a conventional import that stretches out in a different and nobler direction. It is the expression that is so frequently translated "a mighty man of valour" (see Josh. i. 14; vi. 2; viii. 3; x. 7; Judges vi. 12; xi. 1, &c.). In only one other passage is it rendered as it is by King James's translators in the passage before us, viz., in 2 Kings xv. 20. There it is correctly so translated, interpretatively. Here there seems to be a leaning in the same direction, and yet it is not strongly pronounced. Cassel, however, takes the other cue, and translates "a valiant hero." "Probably," says he, "he had distinguished himself in the conflicts of Israel with their enemies." The expression originally means "strong in strength" (δυνατός ἐξῆν, Sept.), but is ambiguous in consequence of the many-sided import of the latter word לָחַץ, which means originally, *either strength, and then valour; or, clan-nish following* (see Raabe), and then *military host, or force, or forces; also, faculty or ability, and then, as so often "answering all things," riches or wealth*. The idea of the writer seems to be that the friend of the

widow's husband was a *strong and substantial yeoman*. He was of the family or clan of Elimelech. The word *family* is conventionally too narrow, and the word *clan* too broad, to represent the import of מִשְׁפָּחָהּ as here used. The idea intended lies somewhere between. **And his name was Boaz.** The root of this name is not found, apparently, in Hebrew, as was supposed by the older philologists, and hence its essential idea is as yet undetermined. Raabe finds its original form in the Sanscrit *bhuvanti*, which yields the idea of *prosperousness*.

Ver. 2.—**And Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi, Let me go, I pray thee, to the cornfields, that I may glean among the ears after whosoever shall show me favour.** In modern style one would not, in referring, at this stage of the narrative, to Ruth, deem it in the least degree necessary or advantageous to repeat the designation "the Moabitess." The repetition is antique, and calls to mind the redundant particularisation of legal phraseology—"the aforesaid Ruth, the Moabitess." She was willing and wishful to avail herself of an Israelitish privilege accorded to the poor, the privilege of gleaning after the reapers in the harvest-fields (see Levit. xix. 9; xxiii. 22; Dent. xxiv. 19). Such gleaning was a humiliation to those who had been accustomed to give rather than to get. But Ruth saw, in the pinched features of her mother-in-law, that there was now a serious difficulty in keeping the wolf outside the door. And hence, although there would be temptation in the step, as well as humiliation, she resolved to avail herself of the harvest season to gather as large a store as possible of those nutritious cereals which form the staff of life, and which they would grind for themselves in their little handmill or quern. She said, with beautiful courtesy, "Let me go. I pray thee;" or, "I wish to go, if you will please to allow me." Such is the force of the peculiar Hebrew idiom. "There is no place," says Lawson, "where our tongues ought to be better governed than in our own houses." **To the cornfields.** Very literally, "to the field." It is the language of townspeople when referring to the land round about the town that was kept under tillage. It was not customary to separate cornfield from



cornfield by means of walls and hedges. A simple furrow, with perhaps a stone here and there, or a small collection of stones, sufficed, as in Switzerland at the present day, to distinguish the patches or portions that belonged to different proprietors. Hence the singular word *field*, as comprehending the sum-total of the adjoining unenclosed ground that had been laid down in grain.

"Though the gardens and vineyards," says Horatio B. Hackett, "are usually surrounded by a stone wall or hedge of prickly pear, the grain-fields, on the contrary, though they belong to different proprietors, are not separated by any enclosure from each other. The boundary between them is indicated by heaps of small stones, or sometimes by single upright stones, placed at intervals of a rod or more from each other. This is the ancient landmark of which we read in the Old Testament" ('Illustrations of Scripture,' p. 110). The word *field* in Hebrew, שָׂדֵה, denotes radically, not so much *plain*, as *ploughed land* (see Raabe's 'Glossar'). In English there is a slightly varied though corresponding idiom lying at the base of the Teutonic term in use. A *field* (German *Feld*) is a *clearance*, a place where the trees of the original forest have been *felled*. The expression, that I may glean 'among' the ears, proceeds on the assumption that Ruth did not expect that she would "make a clean sweep" of all the straggled ears. There might likely be other gleaners besides herself, and even though there should not, she could not expect to gather all. **After who-soever shall show me favour.** A peculiarly antique kind of structure in the original: "after whom I shall find favour in his eyes." Ruth speaks as if she thought only of one reaper, and he the proprietor. She, as it were, instinctively conceives of the labourers as "hands." **And she said to her, Go, my daughter.** Naomi yielded; no doubt at first reluctantly, yet no doubt also in a spirit of grateful admiration of her daughter-in-law, who, when she could not lift up her circumstances to her mind, brought down her mind to her circumstances.

Ver. 3.—Ruth, having obtained the consent of her mother-in-law, **went, and came, and gleaned in the field after the reapers.** That is, she "went forth," viz., from the city, "and came to the cornfields, and gleaned." "There are some," says Lawson, "whose virtue and industry lie only in their tongues. They say, and do not. But Ruth was no less diligent in business than wise in resolution." The later Jews had a set of fantastic bye-laws concerning gleaning, detailed by Maimonides. One of them was, that if only one or two stalks fell from the sickle or hand of the reaper, these should be left lying for the gleaners; but if *three stalks*

fell, then the whole of them belonged to the proprietor (see Carpzov's 'Collegium Rabbinico-Biblicum,' p. 242). Happily for Ruth, her steps were so ordered that the field which she entered as a gleaner belonged to Elimelech's kinsman, Boaz. **And it so happened,** runs the story, **that it was the portion of the fields that belonged to Boaz, who was of the kindred of Elimelech.**

Ver. 4.—On the very day that the Moabites entered on her gleaning, Boaz, in accordance with his wont, as a good and wise master, visited his harvest-field. **And, behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem.** The law of kindness was on his lips; and while benevolence was beaming from his countenance, piety was ruling within his heart. **He said to the reapers, Yahveh be with you! And they said to him, Yahveh bless thee!** Courtesy met courtesy. It is a charming scene, and we may reasonably assume that there was reality in the salutations. Such civilities of intercourse between proprietors and their labourers are still, says Dr. W. M. Thomson, common in the East. "*The Lord be with you!*" is merely the *Allah m'akum!* of ordinary parlance; and so too the response, *The Lord bless thee!*" ('The Land and the Book,' p. 648). Modern Moslems are particular in the matter of salutations. "Abuhurairah reports that he heard Mohammed say, *You will not enter into paradise until you have faith, and you will not complete your faith until you love one another, and that is shown by making salaam to friends and strangers*" (Kitto's 'Bible Illustrations,' in loc.).

Ver. 5.—**And Boaz said to the young man who was set over the reapers, Whose is that young woman?** His eye had been instantaneously arrested by the handsome stranger. Perhaps, as Jarchi remarks, he took note of the modest and graceful carriage of her person while she picked up industriously the straggled stalks. It is too Rabbinic, however, and artificial, finical, bizarre, to suppose with the same Jewish annotator that Boaz would notice with admiration that, while she picked up zealously all available couples of stalks, she left the triplets in the field unappropriated! The question which he put to the overseer is not *who* but *whose is that young woman?* She had not the gait or air of an ordinary pauper, and hence he wondered if she could belong to any of the families in Bethlehem.

Ver. 6.—**And the young man who was set over the reapers replied and said, She is a Moabitish young woman who returned with Naomi from the land of Moab.** The young man had already received, no doubt from her own lips, particulars regarding the attractive stranger. Instead of the free definitive rendering of Luther and King

James's English version, "*the Moabitish damsel*," it is better, with Michaelis, Wright, Raabe, to adhere to the original indefiniteness, "*a Moabitish maiden*." Note the Zeugmatic use of the word *returned* as applied here, as well as in ch. i. 22, not only to Naomi, but also to Ruth. It is thus used on the same Zeugmatic principle as the word *die* in Gen. xlvii. 19: "Wherefore shall we *die* before thine eyes, both *we* and *our* land?"

Ver. 7.—The steward continues his account of Ruth. She had respectfully solicited leave to glean. She said, **Let me glean, I pray thee, and gather in bundles after the reapers.** The expression, "and gather in bundles," is in Hebrew אֶסְפֹּתִי בִּבְרֵיִם, and is rendered in King James's version, as also by Coverdale, Tremellius, Castellio, Luther, Michaelis, "and gather among" or "beside the sheaves." But such a request on the part of Ruth would seem to be too bold, the more especially as we find Boaz afterwards giving instructions to the young men to allow her, without molestation, to glean "even between the sheaves" (ver. 15). Hence Pagnin's free version is to be preferred, "and gather bundles" (*et congregabo manipulos*). Carpov pleads for the same interpretation, and translates thus: "Let me, I pray thee, glean, and collect the gleanings into bundles" (*colligam obsecro spicas, collectasque accumulem in manipulos*). Montanus too adopts it, and Raabe likewise (*und sammele zu Haufen*). The steward praises Ruth's industry. **And she came, and has remained ever since the morning until just now.** She had worked diligently, with scarcely any intermission, from early morning. Drusius says that the following expression, rendered in King James's version that *she tarried a little in the house*, occasioned him critical torture (*locus hic et diu et acriter me torsit*). Coverdale also had been inextricably perplexed. Herenders it, "And within a litle whyle she wolde have bene gone home agayne." The word *house* troubled these and many other interpreters, as if the reference were to Naomi's dwelling-house in the town. The reference, however, is evidently to a temporary hut, shed, tent, or booth erected in the harvest-field for the siesta of the workers, and the accommodation of the master, when he was visiting by day, or exercising supervision by night. We would translate the clause thus—"Her resting at the hut (has been) little." Her siesta in the shade of the hut was but brief. She felt as if she could not afford a long repose.

Ver. 8.—**And Boaz said to Ruth.** We are to suppose that Boaz, having communicated with his overseer, and having given some instructions to his reapers, and likewise to

the young women who bound the reaped corn into sheaves, moved onward to the place where Ruth, keeping modestly far in the rear, was gleaning. He entered into conversation with her, and, among other things, said to her, **Hearrest thou not, my daughter?** A grave antique way of drawing special attention to what is about to follow. "My daughter" is a fatherly expression, appropriate on the part of an elderly person when addressing a young woman. **Do not go to glean in the other field.** Pointing, no doubt, as he spoke, to a 'parcel' of adjoining fields, belonging to a neighbour proprietor. Boaz's interest and sympathy went out strong, all at once, toward the daughter-in-law of his deceased relative. His heart was smitten with admiration for the modest and fascinating widow. He said further to her, as he walked on along with her in the direction of the reapers, and also do not pass on hence. The expression is not a redundant repetition of the preceding utterance. It was intended, apparently, to direct Ruth to a particular line of gleaning-ground, probably right behind the sheaf-binders, which it would be advantageous for her to occupy. He would point it out with his hand. **And so keep close by my young women.** Their proximity would give the stranger a feeling of security, and her nearness to them in their work would be manifestly for her benefit.

Ver. 9.—Boaz continues his talk, led on by an interest that was, probably, surprising to himself. **Let thine eyes be on the field which they are reaping.** He feels increasingly anxious concerning the fascinating stranger, and gives her excellent counsel. "Let not thine eyes be wiled away, wanderingly, from the work on which thou art so praiseworthy engaged." **And go thou behind 'them.'** The reference is not to the same parties, who are indeterminately spoken of in the preceding clause—"which 'they' are reaping." A determinate feminine pronoun makes it evident that the reference is to the maidens, who were working in the rear of the reapers (אֲחֵרֵי, *post eas*). **Have not I charged the young men not to touch thee?** A fine euphemistic injunction; that was best obeyed, however, when most literally construed. **And when thou thirstest, go to the jar, and drink of whatever the young men may draw.** Most likely it would be from the well that was "by the gate" of the city that the young men would draw—that very well of which her illustrious descendant, King David, spake, when he "longed, and said, O that one would give me drink of the water of the well in Bethlehem, which is by the gate" (see 2 Sam. xxiii. 14, 15; 1 Chron. xi. 17, 18). When the water was drawn by the young men,

then the maidens would carry the filled jars upon their heads to the resting-place. Gleaners could not be expected to get the freedom of the water which was thus so laboriously drawn, and then fatiguingly carried from a distance. But Boaz made Ruth free, and thus conferred on her a distinguishing privilege, that must have been at once most acceptable and most valuable. The Vulgate renders the last clause too freely—"of which the young men 'drink.'" The familiar well referred to "appears,"

says Dean Stanley, "close by the gate" of the town ('Sinai and Palestine,' p. 163). Yet not very close. "It is," says Dr. John Wilson, "less than half a mile distant from the present village, and is in a rude enclosure, and consists of a large cistern with several small apertures" ('Lands of the Bible,' vol. i. p. 399). Dr. Wilson has no doubt of its identity, though Dr. Robinson hesitated to come to the same conclusion ('Researches,' vol. ii. p. 158).

### HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—9.—*The harvest-field.* RUTH WAS EAGER TO WORK (see ver. 2). 1. Work is honourable; it is wholesome; inspiring too; the best antidote to *ennui*. If not immoderate, nothing is so efficacious in giving full development to man's *physique*; nothing is so potent to put reins upon passions, and a curb on the tendency to morbid imaginations. All great men and women have been diligent workers. Jesus worked. He who is his Father and ours "worketh hitherto." 2. Ruth did not hesitate to stoop to very lowly work. She was willing and wishful to glean in the harvest-fields (see ver. 2). She humbled herself, and was free from the pride which goes before a fall. She "descended ascendingly." It was in the school of adversity that she had been taught. All honest work is honourable. Dignity is lent to the humblest labours when they are undertaken in a spirit of magnanimity. 3. Ruth expressed her wish to her mother-in-law, and solicited her approval. "Let me go, I pray thee, to the cornfields, that I may glean among the ears after whosoever shall show me favour" (ver. 2). The request was put in a beautifully deferential way. Nowhere is courtesy so precious as in the home. It is comely when displayed by juniors to seniors. It is charming when displayed by seniors to juniors. 4. Naomi yielded to Ruth's request, and said, "Go, my daughter." But we may be sure that it would cost her a pang to give her consent. The tears would start as she turned aside and said, "Is it come to this?" of it. 5. "A Divinity" was "shaping Ruth's ends," and leading her by a way she knew not. She was unconsciously led, as if by a guardian angel sent forth to minister, until she lighted on a field belonging to Boaz, a near kinsman of her own. "And she went forth, and came to the cornfields, and gleaned, and it so happened that it was the portion of the fields that belonged to Boaz, who was of the kindred of Elimelech" (ver. 3). While the Divinity was thus "shaping her ends" for her, she was herself, to the utmost of her little ability, busy in "rough-hewing them." God's agency does not supersede man's, nor does man's supersede God's. Each of us should be able to say, "My Father worketh hitherto, and so do I."

BOAZ ENTERS ON THE SCENE. 1. He had some preparation for the part he was about to act in the nearness of his relationship to Elimelech. In the absence of infinite comprehensiveness, it is right, as well as natural, for friends to take a special interest in friends. 2. Though not a "husband," he was a "husbandman." He had a *house*, and was a *house-band*. He was likewise conspicuous for good *husbandry*. He was in some respects a model *husbandman*. Note his habit of personal inspection and superintendence (see ver. 4, and ch. iii. 3). Note his courtesy to his workers as he passed along: "Yahveh be with you!" (ver. 4). Note the hearty response which his courtesy elicited from his men: "Yahveh bless thee!" Note his habit of making inquiries of his overseer in reference to the state of his affairs (ver. 5). 3. In position he was a substantial yeoman (ver. 1). Stout in person, we may suppose. Stout in principle. Substantial in those resources that make *wealth* contribute to *well*. 4. The reason of his loneliness at home is not hinted at. Perhaps some great sorrow lay buried in his breast; perhaps some bright, sylph-like form lay buried in the grave. 5. He was now, as regards years, an elder in Bethlehem. Most likely all hopes of a brightened home had been for long lying dormant in his spirit. As to his age, it may be inferred from the fatherly way in which he addressed Ruth: "Hearest thou, my daughter?" (ver. 8).

BOAZ AND RUTH. 1. Scarcely had Boaz entered his field, when his eye was arrested by the vision of an elegant and beautiful gleaner, altogether unlike all the rest whom he saw in his field, or had ever seen before. He said to his steward, "Whose young woman is this?" 2. His question was answered, and other information of a highly satisfactory description was communicated. The young woman was a Moabite, who had accompanied home Naomi, her unfortunate mother-in-law (ver. 6). She had, with unwonted respectfulness, solicited liberty to glean. "She said, Let me glean, I pray thee, and gather in bundles, after the reapers" (ver. 7). She had been peculiarly diligent since early morning. "She came, and has remained ever since the morning, till just now" (ver. 7). Nor had she availed herself much of the siesta-boothe. "Her resting at the hut has been little" (ver. 7). She seemed to grudge every moment that was not devoted to work. 3. Having obtained this information, Boaz wended his way to Ruth, speaking to the young men as he passed. When he came up to her, he was at once thrilled with admiration. He expressed to her his desire that she should continue on his fields all through the harvest season. "Hearst thou not, my daughter? Go not to glean on other fields." He showed her, moreover, where she could glean to the best advantage. "Pass not on hence; keep close by my young women." He informed her that, in passing along, he had enjoined the young men not to annoy her. "Have I not charged the young men not to touch thee?" He added that she was to be sure to make full use of the water that was drawn by the young men, and carried to the field by the maidens. "When thou art thirsty, go to the jars, and drink of what the young men have drawn" (ver. 9). In all this we see the beginning of the reward which was, in the providence of God, conferred on noble, self-surrendering, self-sacrificing Ruth. The heart of Boaz was moving toward her. The blessing of the Most High was descending on her. So, in one form or another, will it descend on all who, in their different spheres, carry with them, according to the measure of their capacity, the spirit that, in beautiful activity, stirred and heaved within the heart of the Moabitish gleaner.

#### HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ch. i. 22; ii. 3.—*The gleaner.* Bethlehem, "the house of bread," was famous for the pastures of its hills, and for the rich cornfields in its fertile valleys. The barley-harvest usually happened in April, and it was then that Naomi and Ruth returned to the village of Judah with which their names are associated. The Mosaic law sanctioned the practice of gleaning, commanded that the produce of the fields and vineyards should not be wholly removed, but that a portion should be left "for the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow." Ruth had, therefore, a right to glean.

I. Ruth's gleaning indicates THE POVERTY OF HER CONDITION. None but the necessitous would undertake such an occupation. Naomi and she must indeed have returned empty. In our land, and in our days, happily for the poor, there is always more remunerative work to be had by the industrious poor than this, which accordingly has, with the growing prosperity of the country, almost dropped out of use.

II. RUTH'S ABSENCE OF PRIDE is very apparent. The family into which she had married had owned some of the adjoining land; but in changed circumstances she was not too proud to mingle with the gleaners, and in lowly guise to gather ears of corn.

III. We cannot but admire Ruth's VIRTUOUS INDUSTRY. Boaz afterwards said, in praise of her conduct, "Thou followedst not young men." She chose a blameless, though laborious, life. An example to all to avoid dependence, and to cultivate the habit of self-reliance and diligence.

IV. Remark Ruth's FILIAL LOVE. She worked not only for herself, but for her mother-in-law, and found a pleasure in supporting her.

V. SUCCESS attends Ruth's honest toil. She gathered barley with her hands; special favour was shown to her; a friend was raised up to assist her; prosperity crowned her efforts. "Thy bread shall be given thee, and thy water shall be sure."—T.

Ver. 3.—*Her hap.* Words could hardly be more suggestive than these. They may be applied to circumstances in the life of every one of us. There have been turning-points in our history; we took one path rather than another, and with results

(as we now see) how momentous to ourselves! So was it with Ruth of Moab, the gleaner.

I. **MANY OF OUR ACTIONS ARE PERFORMED WITHOUT ANY THOUGHT OR INTENTION REGARDING THEIR RESULTS.** In ordinary affairs how often do we decide and act without any special sense of the wisdom of one course rather than another! And there are positions in which our choice seems quite immaterial. It seemed of little consequence in which field this young foreigner, this friendless widow, went to glean a few ears of barley. So is it often with us. Shall we go to such a place? shall we pay such a visit? shall we form such an acquaintance? shall we read such a book? shall we venture on such a remark? shall we write such a note?

II. **UNFORESEEN AND IMPORTANT ISSUES MAY DEPEND UPON CASUAL ACTIONS.** Though it seemed of little consequence in which field Ruth gleaned, "*her hap* was to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz," and from this fact sprang results of the greatest importance. "*Her hap*" determined her marriage, her wealth, her happiness and that of her mother-in-law, her union with Israel, her motherhood, her position as an ancestress of David and of Christ. In such seemingly insignificant causes originate the most momentous issues. Thus oftentimes it comes to pass that family relationships are formed, a professional career is determined; nay, religious decision may be brought about, life-work for Christ may be appointed, eternal destiny is affected.

Lessons:—1. Regard nothing as insignificant. 2. Look out for, and follow, the leadings of Divine providence. 3. "In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths!"—T.

Ver. 4.—*Salutations.* It is a pleasant picture of old-world life among the ancient Hebrews, this of the "mighty man of wealth" coming down from his house to his cornfields to watch the work of the reapers, the progress of the harvest. Boaz seems to have lived on friendly terms with those in his employment, and to have taken an interest in them and in their toils. A lesson for all masters and employers of labour. And how picturesque the scene when the proprietor meets his labourers, and they exchange the customary greeting of the East, sanctified by Hebrew piety! *Salutations* are—

I. **SANCTIONED BY SCRIPTURAL USAGE.** *E.g.* When the mower filleth his hand, and he that bindeth sheaves his bosom, "they which go by say, The blessing of the Lord be upon you: we bless you in the name of the Lord!" (Ps. cxxix.). *E.g.* Angels are represented as greeting those they are commissioned to visit. Gideon was saluted thus: "The Lord is with thee;" and Mary thus: "Hail, highly favoured one! the Lord is with thee." *E.g.* Christ himself was wont to greet his disciples, saying, "Peace be with you!" *E.g.* The apostles closed their letters with greetings and benedictions. "The Lord of peace himself give you peace always by all means: the Lord be with you all!"

II. **FOUNDED UPON DIVINELY-IMPLANTED PRINCIPLES OF HUMAN NATURE.** They presume our social existence and nature. They imply sympathy. They express friendly and benevolent feelings.

III. **CONDUCTIVE TO THE EASY AND PLEASANT INTERCOURSE OF HUMAN SOCIETY.** We all feel the influence of courteous address, polite expressions, and the minor benevolences of life. Christians should not be offended or contemptuous when well-meaning persons accost them with hand-shaking and minute inquiries after health, &c.; if well meant, courtesies should be kindly accepted.

IV. In the case of pious persons, **EXPRESSIVE OF PRAYERFUL WISHES FOR GOOD.** How many of our common salutations have their origin in piety and prayer! So, in the text, The Lord be with you! The Lord bless thee! So with such phrases as, Adieu! Good-bye! Good morning! God bless you! Farewell! They all convey a desire, a prayer. Let our salutations be sincere, and let our language and our conduct prove that they are so.—T.

Vers. 5—14.—*Filial piety and fidelity recognised and recompensed.* As "the whole city was moved" at Naomi's return, it is not surprising that the foreman over the reapers was able to answer the inquiry of Boaz—"Whose damsel is this?"

Though Boaz had not seen her before, he knew her story, and was evidently pleased to meet her. His judgments were just, his feelings were appropriate, his language was considerate, his conduct was generous. The character of Boaz commands our respect; and his treatment of Ruth, from beginning to end, was not only blameless, it was admirable. As we follow the simple and interesting narrative, we observe—

I. **FILIAL PIETY AWAKENING INTEREST.** The beauty of the Moabitess, though in complexion or figure she was "not like unto one of the handmaidens" of Boaz, her modest demeanour and graceful movements, all excited remark and admiration; but, probably, had he not known of her coming back with Naomi, and of all she had done unto her mother-in-law, he would not have addressed her. His interest expressed itself in kindly language and treatment, such as were very suitable in the circumstances. In ver. 11 Boaz acknowledges, in appreciative language, her disinterested devotion.

II. **FILIAL PIETY PROMPTS AN OBSERVER'S FERVENT PRAYER.** In ver. 12 Boaz is recorded to have said, "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." Who can contemplate a life of self-sacrifice, of affectionate devotion and service, without asking God to reward it with a recompense not in man's power to bestow? No prayers are purer and more effectual than those presented for a devoted, dutiful, affectionately ministering daughter!

III. **FILIAL PIETY SECURES A GENEROUS AND PRACTICAL RECOMPENSE.** Boaz was so gratified by what he heard of Ruth's conduct, and what he observed in her bearing and language, that he became the agent of Providence in rewarding her excellence. He bade her abide in his fields; he charged the young men to treat her with respect; he bade her take with welcome of the water, the wine, the bread, and the parched corn provided for the reapers. She found favour in his sight, and he comforted her by his friendly words.

Lesson:—Divine providence does not overlook human virtue. Not that man has merit before God; but the fruits of the spirit are pleasing to the Giver of the Spirit. And God will raise up ministers of recompense for the comfort of his faithful children!—T.

Ver. 4.—"The Lord be with you. And they answered him, The Lord bless thee." Nothing is more beautiful in national history than good feeling between masters and men. Religion alone can inspire this feeling. It fails before mere expediency, and can only be secured by mutual dependence on God and on each other.

I. **THE LIVING PRESENCE.** The Lord with us means courage and consolation—courage to face difficulty, and consolation in all times of depression and disheartenment. Christ has given us his own gracious promise, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."

II. **THE HARVEST TOIL.** "Said unto the reapers." It is hard work everywhere in the glaring heat to put in the sickle, and to gather up the sheaves. We may learn from the spectacle the blessed lesson of our duty in relation to others. Let us try to cheer and inspire. Some are full of cold indifference, and others of critical complaint. We little know what a word of cheer does for others. Blame makes the hands hang down, and quenches that music of the heart which makes work pleasant and successful. Encouragement is like fresh strength to weary hearts.

III. **THE KIND RESPONSE.** The benediction of Boaz awakens a corresponding benediction from the reapers. The harp answers to the hand that sweeps it. Men are to us very much what we are to them. "The Lord bless thee." We need never despair of this reward. Love begets love. Confidence begets confidence. Blessing awakens blessing. This is what we long and pray for—cessation of war between capitals and labour, and mutual benediction.—W. M. S.

Ver. 7.—"I pray thee let me glean." In rural life no sight is pleasanter than the hour when the gleaners come in and "gather after the reapers among the sheaves." It bespeaks "something to spare." It is like the "commons" or the grass by the roadside for the poor man's cattle. We all like the spectacle of plenty; we all like

the consciousness that the overflowings of the cup of plenty are to be tasted by others.

I. THERE IS WORK FOR THE HUMBLEST TO DO. We may not be permitted to take a leading part even in God's great harvest-field, but we can all do something. We can glean words of comfort to carry to the bedsides of the sick and the homes of the poor. We can glean in the fields of Scripture lessons for the little ones, and promises for the broken-hearted. Thank God there is a place in the world for gleaners as well as reapers.

II. THERE IS WORK TO BE SOUGHT OUT. It is asked for. "I pray thee." How many complain that no one finds a service for them. They are waiters and idlers because no one gives them a commission, or secures them a suitable field. They wait to be sought out, instead of saying, "Here am I, send me." They wait to be besought, instead of beseeching for work. What a glorious day for the Church of Christ everywhere when men seek for the honour of service.

III. ALL WORK DEMANDS PERSEVERANCE. How constant Ruth is! "She came, and hath continued from the morning until now." How much spasmodic energy there is; how many ploughs are left mid-furrow; how many begin and do not finish. It is not genius that wins the goal, but plodding earnestness. Ye did run well, glean well; what doth hinder you?—W. M. S.

## EXPOSITION.

### CHAPTER II. 10—17.

Ver. 10.—RUTH did not seize the opportunity for bewailing the hardship of the lot to which she had been reduced, and which now constrained her to undertake a species of work which at one time she little anticipated. With beautiful humility and modesty, and in the profoundest gratitude, she accepted wonderingly the kindness of Boaz. And she fell on her face. A rather remarkable expression, physiologically viewed. Her face was part of herself. How then could she fall on it? It was part of that which fell, and yet she is said to fall *upon* (עַל) it, as if it had been underneath the self-hood that fell. It was what was undermost as she bowed herself, so that the pressure of the sum-total of the body fell on it as she gracefully stooped. And prostrated herself to the ground. Thus completing, and doubtless in no sprawling or clumsy way, her respectful obeisance. Her face would be made, with æsthetic delicacy of movement, to touch the ground. Wherefore have I found favour in thine eyes? She was surprised, amazed, bewildered. So that thou takest notice of me, and I a stranger! Boaz had done far more than merely take notice of her. But, with equal gratitude and felicity, she specifies not the culminating acts of kindness, but the very first step that her benefactor had taken. He began by taking notice of her. There is an interesting *paranomasia* in the two words נִקְרָא and נִכְרָא. A foreigner, though unknown, and just indeed because unknown, is naturally noted and noticed.

Ver. 11.—Boaz's interest and admiration

grew. And Boaz answered and said to her, It has been fully showed to me, all that thou hast done toward thy mother-in-law since the death of thy husband: and that thou hast left thy father and thy mother, and the land of thy nativity, and hast come to a people whom heretofore thou knewest not. When Boaz says, "It has been fully showed to me," he probably refers to the information which he had received from his overseer. The expression rendered "fully showed" is a fine specimen of a very antique idiom, *showed-showed* (רָאָה רָאָה). "Toward thy mother-in-law." The preposition which we render "toward" is literally "with," which, indeed, when laid side by side with the Hebrew preposition, looks as if it were organically identical. (תָּס = *eth*. Compare the old Hebrew *etha* with the Sanscrit *itāh*. See Raabe's 'Glossar'). The expression which we render "heretofore" is literally "yesterday and the day before," a very primitive way of representing *time past*. It must have been like balm to the anxious heart of Ruth to hear from the lips of such a man as Boaz so hearty a "well-done." "Ruth," says the venerable Lawson, "showed no disposition to praise herself. She did not claim a right to glean from what she had done for Naomi, but wondered that such kindness should be showed by Boaz to her who was a stranger, and she hears the voice of praise from the mouth of one whose commendations were a very great honour. No saying was oftener in the mouth of Jesus than this, *He that exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.*"

Ver. 12.—May Yahveh requite thy work, and may thy recompense be complete from

**Yahveh God of Israel, to trust under whose wings thou art come.** Already there were streaks of light shooting athwart Boaz's horizon. His very phraseology is getting tipped with unwonted beauty. He sees Ruth cowering trustfully under the outstretched wings of Him who is "good to all, and whose tender mercies are over all his works" in all lands (see Ps. xci. 1—4). The metaphor, says Fuller, "is borrowed from a hen, which, with her clucking, summons together her straggling chickens, and then outstretcheth the fan of her wings to cover them." "Who would not," says Topsell, "forsake the shadow of all the trees in the world to be covered under 'such' wings!"

**Ver. 13.—May I continue to find favour, sir, in thine eyes, for indeed thou hast comforted me, and cheered the heart of thine handmaid, and yet I have not the position of one of thy maidens.** To be one of his maidens was, in her estimation, to be in a most desirable condition. She could not aspire to that. But as he had spoken so graciously to her heart, and soothed its sorrows, she trusted he would still befriend her. מְצוֹנָה should not be rendered, with the Vulgate, "I have found" (*inveni*); nor, with Tremellius and Junius, "I find" (*invenio*); but, with Piscator, optatively, "may I find" (*inveniam*), that is, "may I still find, may I continue to find." So Luther, Coverdale, and Michaelis. The courtesy-expression, rendered in King James's version "my lord" (יְהוָה = *Mein-Herr* or *Monsieur*), is used, as Carpzov remarks, in "humility and civility."

**Ver. 14.—And Boaz, at meal-time, said to her, Come along hither.** Luther, Coverdale, and King's James's English translators took the expression "at meal-time" as part of the report of Boaz's words: "And Boaz said, *At meal-time come along hither.*" But it is evidently to be taken, in accordance with the Masoretic punctuation, as the historical statement of the narrator: "At meal-time, Boaz said, *Come along hither.*" At meal-time Boaz rejoined Ruth, and said to her, "Come along hither." Then they would walk along in company, till they reached the siesta-hut. **And eat of the bread, that is going, and dip thy morsel in the vinegar, or the sour wine** that was quite a favourite beverage with out-door workers. It had a peculiarly cooling and refreshing effect. It corresponded to the *posca* used by the Roman soldiery, and would, according to circumstances and individual taste, be taken either "neat" or diluted with water. **And she sat by the side of the reapers.** Probably along with the other young women, although the reference to them is accidentally overlapped by

the specification of the male workers. **And he prepared for her a bunch of parched corn.** מַצֵּי is only conjecturally rendered "reached" in King James's version, and by many other translators. The rendering is given under the leadership of the Chaldee Paraphrast, who explains the word by מְצוֹנָה, which is a pure Chaldee word for "reached." But light is thrown on the old Hebrew word by both Arabic and Sanscrit cognates, as well as by the Septuagint version (ἐβούνισε). It meant to *bind into a bunch* or *bunches* (see Fürst and Raabe). The word is illustrated by modern Oriental usage. Dr. W. M. Thomson says, "Harvest is the time for parched corn. It is made thus:—A quantity of the best ears, not too ripe, are plucked with the stalks attached. These are tied into small parcels; a blazing fire is kindled with dry grass and thorn bushes, and the corn-heads are held in it until the chaff is mostly burnt off. The grain is thus sufficiently roasted to be eaten, and it is a favourite article all over the country" ("The Land and the Book," p. 648). Mr. Legh, in like manner, states, in MacMichael's 'Journey, 1819, that, travelling in harvest-time in the country east of the Dead Sea, they one day rested near some cornfields, "where one of the Arabs, having plucked some green ears of corn, parched them for us by putting them into the fire, and then, when roasted, rubbing out the grain in his hands" (Kitto's 'Pictorial Bible,' *in loc.*). Sometimes, however, the parched corn is otherwise prepared. Dr. Robinson says, "In one field, as we approached Kubeibeh, nearly 200 reapers and gleaners were at work; the latter being nearly as numerous as the former. A few were taking their refreshment, and offered us some of their 'parched corn.' In the season of harvest the grains of wheat, not yet fully dry and hard, are roasted in a pan or on an iron plate, and constitute a very palatable article of food. This is eaten with bread, or instead of it. Indeed, the use of it is so common at this time among the labouring classes, that this parched wheat is sold in the markets; and it was among our list of articles to be purchased at Hebron for our journey to Wady Mûsa. The Arabs, it was said, prefer it to rice; but this we did not find to be the case. The whole scene of the reapers and gleaners, and their 'parched corn,' gave us a lively representation of the story of Ruth and the ancient harvest-time in the fields of Boaz" ('Biblical Researches,' vol. ii. p. 394, ed. 1841). Boaz had given Ruth a kind of Benjamin's portion of parched corn. She could not use it all. **And she ate, and was satisfied, and left over.** Carefully reserving, however, and "basketing up" the liberal surplus.



Ver. 15.—And she rose to glean : and Boaz charged his young men, saying, Even between the sheaves let her glean, and do not affront her. Boaz would probably thus speak in the hearing of Ruth herself, so that, without any fear of reproach, she might feel free to take full advantage of the privilege accorded her. Boaz wished her to gather a large glean, no doubt rightly conjecturing that there must have been for some time past but little superfluity in the larder of Naomi. The space "between the sheaves," as distinguished from the spaces outside their line, would probably be the part whither the maidens conveyed their collected armfuls, and where they bound them into sheaves. It would thus be the place where there would be the greatest number of 'waifs.' It would also be the place in which unprincipled gleaners might have the best opportunity for stealing from the sheaves. Boaz felt unbounded confidence in Ruth, and said to the reapers, "Affront her not," namely, by saying or insinuating anything to the effect that she was either pilfering, on the one hand, or making herself too forward, on the other. The Vulgate version completely merges out of sight the poetic beauty and tenderness of the injunction by rendering it thus : "Do not hinder her."

Ver. 16.—And even of set purpose draw out for her from the bundles, and leave them, and let her glean them, and do not find fault with her. His kindness grows as he sees her, or speaks concerning her. He gives additional injunctions in her favour, both to the young men and to the maidens, though the line of distinction between the two sexes dips at times entirely out of sight. When the sheaf-makers had gathered an armful of stalks, and there seemed to be so clean a sweep that none were left behind, then they were of set purpose (*de industria*) to draw out some from the bunches or bundles, and leave them lying. The act of deliberate, as opposed to unintentional, drawing, is expressed by the emphatic repetition of the verb וַיִּקַּח. The verb thus repeated was a puzzle to the older expositors, inclusive of all the Hebrew commentators. But comparative philology has clearly determined its radical import, and thus illuminated its use in the passage before us. It does not here mean "spoil," though that is its usual signification. Nor can it mean "let fall," as in King James's version. It means draw out. Do not find fault with her. The word is almost always rendered *rebuke* in our English version; but the force of the preposition may be represented thus: "do not chide 'with' her." "It was," says Dr. Andrew Thomson, "a thoughtful and delicate form of kindness to Ruth, thus

to increase her gleanings, and yet to make them all appear the fruit of her own industry." "There are persons to be met with in social life who, while possessing the more solid qualities of moral excellence, are singularly deficient in the more graceful. They have honesty, but they have no sensibility; they have truth, but they are strangely wanting in tenderness. They are distinguished by *whatsoever things are just and pure*, but not by those which are *lovely and of good report*. You have the marble column, but you have not the polish or the delicate tracery on its surface; you have the rugged oak, but you miss the jasmine or the honeysuckle creeping gracefully around it from its roots. But the conduct of Boaz, as we stand and hear him giving these directions to his reapers, proves the compatibility of those two forms of excellence, and how the strong and the amiable may meet and harmonise in the same character. Indeed, they do always meet in the highest forms of moral greatness" ('Studies on the Book of Ruth,' pp. 119, 120).

Ver. 17.—And she gleaned in the field until the evening, and beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley. Gathering together her various sheaves, lots, or bundles (see ver. 7), she threshed them with some suitable rod or simple 'flail' (*flagellum*), which she had either brought with her in the morning, as part of her equipment as a gleaner, or had obtained at the hut; or perhaps, like many others, she would make use of a convenient stone. Speaking of the village of Hûj, near Gaza, Robinson says, "We found the lazy inhabitants still engaged in treading out the barley harvest, which their neighbours had completed long before. Several women were beating out with a stick handfuls of the grain which they seemed to have gleaned. One female was grinding with a handmill, turning the mill with one hand, and occasionally dropping in the grain with the other" ('Researches,' vol. ii. p. 385). "In the evening," says Dr. W. M. Thomson, "you might see some poor woman or maiden, that had been permitted to glean on her own account, sitting by the roadside, and beating out with a stick or a stone what she had gathered, as Ruth did. I have often watched this process in various parts of the country" ('The Land and the Book,' p. 647). The diligent gleaner on Boaz's field found, after threshing, that she had nearly an ephah of barley. It would be a considerable load for a female to carry—about a bushel. Josephus mentions incidentally, in his 'Antiquities' (xv. 8, 2), that the Hebrew *cor* or *homer* was equivalent to ten Attic *μίδρυμναι*. But as the ephah was exactly the tenth part of a *cor* or *homer*, it follows that the Hebrew

ephah was equivalent to the Attic μέδιμνος. Moreover, just as the ephah was the tenth part of a homer, so the omer was the tenth part of an ephah (Exod. xvi. 36); and thus, if an omer of barley would be somewhat equivalent for nutritive purposes to an omer

of manna, it would be a sufficient daily allowance for a man (see Exod. xvi. 16). Hence Ruth would take home with her what would suffice for several days' sustenance to Naomi and herself.

### HOMILETICS.

Vers. 10—17.—*The harvest-field again.* Let us return to the Oriental harvest-field. Harvest-fields in general are lively scenes. Emphatically so in the East, where bright weather may be calculated on with almost absolute certainty. Pleasantry and work go hand in hand. Dr. W. M. Thomson, speaking of Philistia, says, "When the fog dispersed, the whole plain appeared to be dotted over with harvesting parties; men reaping, women and children gleaning and gathering the grain into bundles, or taking care of the flocks, which followed closely upon the footsteps of the gleaners. All seemed to be in good humour, enjoying the cool air of the morning. There was singing, alone and in chorus, incessant talking, home-made jokes, and laughing loud and long" ("The Land and the Book," p. 543). The harvest scene as represented on the shield of Achilles may be recalled (see the eighteenth book of the 'Iliad').

1. We find Boaz and Ruth still standing where we left them (vers. 9, 10). Surely some great attraction is detaining the busy husbandman, a 'man of affairs.' 2. A group of Graces are tripping round about Ruth. There is, firstly, *gratitude*, always lovely and welcome. If in any soul it be meagre, stinted, stunted, the soil of that soul is shallow. There is, secondly, *respectfulness*. "She fell on her face, and did obeisance to the ground" (ver. 10). Respectfulness is the homage that is due to a noble nature, and to him who is the Creator of it. We are to "honour the king." True; but we are likewise to "honour all men" (1 Pet. ii. 17), for there is something kingly after all in the nature of all. Then there is, thirdly, *wonder*. "Why have I found favour in thine eyes, so that thou takest notice of me, and I a stranger?" (ver. 10). Some accept attentions and kindnesses as things of course. Some almost exact them, as if they were dues. Not so the nobler souls. They wonder when distinction is conferred on them. Moses wondered: "Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?" (Exod. iii. 11). David wondered: "Who am I, O Lord God? and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto?" (2 Sam. vii. 18). Paul wondered: "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Eph. iii. 8). 3. Boaz explained to the wondering stranger why it gratified him to show her attention. "It hath been fully showed unto me, all that thou hast done toward thy mother-in-law since the death of thy husband: and that thou hast left thy father and thy mother, and the land of thy nativity, and hast come to a people whom heretofore thou knewest not" (ver. 11). His spirit seems to kindle as he proceeds, so that his words become tipped with brightness and beauty. He "winds the robes of ideality around the bareness" of mere facts (J. Ingelow). He says, "The Lord requite thy work, and may thy recompense be complete from the Lord God of Israel, to trust under whose wings thou art come" (ver. 12). Words "fitly spoken!" "Words spoken in due season!" "How good they are!" A word, in particular, of well-deserved appreciation and commendation is peculiarly "good." It goes to the heart, and is often mighty to animate to victorious courage and hope. Nobler in its aims than "fame," it is yet, like "fame," a "spur, that the clear spirit doth raise, to scorn delights and live laborious days" (Milton). 4. Note the fine expression, "to trust under whose wings thou art come." Compare what the Psalmist says: "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty." "He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust" (Ps. xci. 1, 4). Compare what Jesus said: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not" (Matt. xxiii. 37). Compare what the Christian poet says:

“ All my trust on thee is stayed ;  
 All my help from thee I bring ;  
 Cover my defenceless head  
 With the shadow of thy wing.”

5. Just as Boaz was turning to complete the supervision of his harvest-field, Ruth, with delicate acknowledgments for the past, prefers a humble request for the future. “ May I continue, sir, to find favour in thine eyes ; for indeed thou hast comforted me, and cheered the heart of thine handmaid, and yet I have not the position of one of thy maidens ” (ver. 13). Thus from one to the other, under the impulse of some subtle spontaneity, was the shuttle of respectful feeling shot and re-shot. 6. The scene is now shifting. The two separate. Boaz proceeds to attend to the various details of his husbandry. Ruth returns to the monotony of her gleaning. Both exhibit a worthy example of painstaking industry. 7. Time advances. The work proceeds. The sun hastens towards its zenith. The hour for siesta is at hand. Boaz turns once more in the direction of Ruth. He rejoins her, and invites her to accompany him to the place of temporary shelter, refreshment, and rest. “ At meal-time Boaz said to her, Come along hither, and eat of the bread, and dip thy morsel in the vinegar ” (ver. 14). All the workers—but of course not the gleaners—assemble around the master. Ruth is seated among the rest, and is carefully attended to. “ She sat beside the reapers : and Boaz prepared for her a bunch of parched corn, and she ate, and was satisfied, and left over ” (ver. 14). Then there is more work. Boaz gives still more liberal instructions to the young men. “ Even between the sheaves let her glean, and do not affront her ” (ver. 15). “ And even of set purpose draw out for her from the bundles, and leave them, and let her glean them, and do not find fault with her ” (ver. 16). At length, at the close of the day, Ruth gathered her bundles together, and threshed them, and found that she had about an ephah of barley—as much as a woman could be expected to carry. Thus is the dawn of Ruth’s prosperity growing brighter and brighter, and giving promise of a day that shall be as “ the bridal of the earth and sky.” The Lord is “ recompensing her work.” The shadows are fleeing.

“ As morning in the east,  
 Stands winged to mount in day,  
 So for a swift surprise of joy  
 Our God prepares his way ” (Gibbons).

So assuredly will there be a corresponding dayspring from on high to all who, in the midst of thickening trials, maintain their integrity, and engage in “ works of faith ” and “ labours of love.” There may be, there will be, differences in the degree of prosperity and reward, even as star differeth from star in magnitude and lustre. It is not to be expected that all shall have such reversions on earth as were granted to Job and to Ruth. Nevertheless, none will be forgotten. Every several blade of grass will have its own drop of dew. Love on the part of man will be crowned with love on the part of God. And when love rises to Jesus, the ideal Son of man, then it is capped with more love ; for, says he, “ my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him ” (John xiv. 23). All three will “ sup together ” (Rev. iii. 20). “ Sorrow and sighing will flee away.”

### HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 15—17.—*Liberality to the poor.* The customs recorded in these chapters remain—many of them—to the present day. As to *gleaning*, Robinson says, “ The way led us through open fields, where the people were in the midst of the wheat-harvest. The beautiful tracts of grain were full of reapers of the Henâdy Arabs, and also of gleaners almost as numerous. These were mostly women ; and this department seemed almost as important as the reaping itself, since the latter is done in so slovenly a manner, that not only much falls to the ground, but also many stalks remain uncut. In one field nearly 200 reapers and gleaners were at work, the latter being nearly as numerous as the former.” As to *threshing*, Robinson mentions

that "several women were beating out with a stick handfuls of the grain which they seemed to have gleaned." As to the *parching of corn*, the same writer says, "The grains of wheat, not yet fully dry and hard, are roasted in a pan or on an iron plate, and eaten along with bread, or instead of it." Boaz showed his practical sympathy with the widows of the narrative by giving parched corn to Ruth to eat, and by securing that her gleanings should be even more successful and abundant than was usual with the maidens.

I. Liberality to the poor should ACCORD WITH THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE GIVER.

II. It should TAKE A FORM ADAPTED TO THE WANTS OF THE RECIPIENT.

III. It should BE UNGRUDGING AND GRACEFUL IN ITS BESTOWAL.

IV. It should BE INSPIRED BY THE MEMORY OF THE UNDESERVED BOUNTY OF THE GREAT GIVER, GOD.

V. It should NOT COUNT UPON, though it may have occasion to rejoice in, THE GRATITUDE OF THE BENEFICIARY.—T.

Ver. 10.—"I am a stranger!" What a touching word. In some cities there is the strangers' burying-ground. There they sleep as they lived, separated from their brethren.

I. THE HEBREWS WERE KIND TO STRANGERS. Their Divine revelation gave them injunctions concerning the stranger within their gates. They were to be considerate and kind to the cattle; how much more to those made in the image of God like themselves! The young learnt this lesson; from earliest years they were taught the law while "sitting in the house." Boaz knew all this, and he "lived" it.

II. STRANGERS HAVE SENSITIVE HEARTS. Their experiences make them quick to feel insult or blessing. Never can they quite escape the consciousness, "I am a stranger." In other lands, under other skies, the stranger carries far-away visions of the heart within, which make the spirit pensive. Consequently, care and love are intensely appreciated by them. Religion is the life of love and the death of selfishness wherever it lives and reigns in the heart.

III. STRANGERS IN TIME MAKE A FATHERLAND OF THE NEW HOME. So did Ruth. New ties sprang up; for love looks forward. Children take the place of ancestors, and we live in *them*. How often we are tempted to forget our own lot. "Remember that ye were strangers," therefore deal kindly with them. Think how precious to you was the fellowship of hearts that stole away your sadness as a stranger at school, or in the new city of life and duty. What a consolation it is that we are never strangers in our Father's sight, and that everywhere we may find "home" in God.—W. M. S.

Vers. 12, 13.—"The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee." Here we see that the character of God is gloriously revealed. It is understood by Boaz that God is a God of "rewards," and we need not fear that a mistaken notion of rewards and punishments will prevail amongst students of the Bible. God's highest blessings are given to the soul; but it remains true that even in the earthly life the outworking of duty is blessing.

I. HERE IS THE HISTORIC NAME. "The Lord God of Israel." What memories cluster around that significant sentence! We see in it a "miniature" of all Hebrew deliverance and mercy.

II. HERE IS THE COMPREHENSIVE BLESSING. "A full reward." *That* must refer to the inner self—to the consciousness of heroic fidelity and filial love. Many rewards are precious, but no reward is full that does not "bless us indeed."

III. HERE IS THE HOMELY ANALOGY. "Under whose wings," &c. All nature is taken into the illustrative record of the inspired word. The wing! How strong without. How easily outspread. How "downy" within. So soft! so warm! The rain cannot reach through the outward covering. Notice how roof-like are the arrangements of the feathers, and notice also how *complete* is the canopy.

IV. HERE IS THE PERSONAL TRUST. "Thou art come to trust." We must not forget not alone what God reveals himself as, to us, but what responsibility rests on us, to "rest in the Lord."—W. M. S.

## EXPOSITION.

## CHAPTER II. 18—23.

Ver. 18.—**And she lifted it up, and went into the city: and her mother-in-law beheld what she had gleaned. She likewise brought forth, and gave to her, what she had left over after she was satisfied.** It would be with gratitude and pride that Ruth would let her heavy burden slip off into the hands of Naomi. It would be with gratitude and wonder that Naomi would behold the precious load. Other gentle emotions would stir within the mother-in-law's hungry heart when her beloved daughter-in-law produced and presented the remains of her delightfully refreshing repast at the tent. The expression, "after she was satisfied," is literally, "from her satiety."

Ver. 19.—**And her mother-in-law said to her, Where hast thou gleaned to-day? and where hast thou worked? May he who took notice of thee be blessed!** The grateful eagerness of the mother-in-law to get full information overflows in a delightful redundancy. "Where hast thou gleaned to-day? and where hast thou worked?" She saw at a glance, from the magnitude of the load, from the bright and beaming countenance of her daughter-in-law, and from the delicious parched corn which the master had given with his own hands, that the day had been crowned with peculiar blessings. The lines had fallen in pleasant places. Hence her womanly and motherly interest to get full particulars. Ruth, on her part, would feel as if a kind of inspiration had seized upon her tongue. **And she showed to her mother-in-law with whom she had worked, and she said, The name of the man with whom I worked to-day is Boaz.** A thrill would shoot through Naomi's heart as that once familiar name fell upon her ears.

Ver. 20.—**And Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, Blessed 'of' Yahveh be he who—** The expression is literally, "Blessed 'to' Yahveh be he who," that is, "Blessed in relation to Yahveh be he who," or "Blessed be he! I carry the desire and prayer up to Yahveh," which just amounts, in meaning, to this: "Blessed 'by' Yahveh be he who." See other instances of the same construction in Gen. xiv. 19, and Ps. cxv. 15. **Who has not let go his kindness to the living and to the dead.** Some take these words to be descriptive of Yahveh. Others take them to be descriptive of Boaz. If they be regarded in the former point of view, then the foregoing clause must be rendered, not, "Blessed by Yahveh be he who," but, "Blessed be he by Yahveh who." Dr. Cassel assumes, but without any formal

reasoning or apparent reason, that the reference of the relative is to Yahveh, and hence he makes out an ingenious argument in defence of the doctrine, *that those who are dead to us are yet alive to God*—the doctrine of immortality. It is strained. Yet Raabe thinks that the reference is to Yahveh, inasmuch as Naomi had as yet no evidence of Boaz's kindness to the deceased. The reason thus given for carrying the reference up to God is certainly unsatisfactory; for, looking at the subject from the human point of view, it is obvious that Boaz's peculiar kindness to the living was his kindness to the deceased; whereas, if we look at the case from the Divine point of view, it is difficult, if not impossible, to account for the discrimination between the living and the dead. The first feeling that sprang up in the heart of Naomi at the mention of the name of Boaz was one of adoration. The next was a generous desire in reference to Boaz himself. She prayed that he might be graciously recompensed by Yahveh for the kindness he had shown that day, both toward the living—Ruth and herself—and toward the deceased—Elimelech and his sons. A man of less noble nature might have been ready, in reference to relatives in reduced circumstances, to ignore the present, and to bury in oblivion the past. After giving scope to her feelings of adoration and benediction, Naomi, with the prompt and practical directness of a true woman, said to her daughter-in-law, **The man is near to us, adding immediately, and with a rapid glance at bright contingencies that were in the region of the possible, He is one of our peculiar kinsmen (our Go'elim).** She meant that he was one of those peculiarly near kinsmen who had a right of redemption over whatever lands may have formerly belonged to her, and the first right of purchase over whatever lands might yet remain in the possession of herself or of her daughter-in-law. Naomi and Ruth, though greatly reduced in circumstances, and painfully pent up in present straits, were far from being paupers. They were proprietors (see ch. iv. 3, 5). But their property was not, for the time being, available for income or sustenance. It had either been farmed out on usufruct or allowed to lie waste. In the absence of the *yod* in **אֵלֶימֶלֶךְ** we have an instance of *scriptio defectiva*, as distinguished from *scriptio plena*. Such defective manuscryption might be expected to occur occasionally in transcription from dictation, when, as here, the presence or the absence of the letter made no difference in the pro-

nunciation of the reader. Michaelis, however ('Mosniaches Recht,' § 137), and Gesenius ('Thesaurus,' *in voc.*), instead of regarding the absence of the *god* as an instance of *scriptio defectiva*, have conjectured that **שְׁנֵי** is a noun, or name, meaning *the second in order of the Goëlim*. But, notwithstanding the ingenuity of the conjecture, there is not a shadow of evidence to evince that the Hebrews themselves ever knew of such a word. Nor does the supposition or subsumption of such a word in the least facilitate the construction on the one hand, or illumine the narrative on the other.

Ver. 21.—**And Ruth the Moabitess said.** It seems to us rather remarkable that Ruth should be here again particularised formally as "the Moabitess." There is apparently no discoverable reason for the re-repetition. It is simply antique particularity, not amenable to any literary law—"the said Moabitess." There is a peculiar abruptness in the initial words of what follows:—**Yea also he said to me.** Carpzov and Wright understand them thus: "'Yea' blessed be he, 'for' he said to me." But the word *blessed*, as used by Naomi, is too far removed to make it natural for the *yea* of Ruth's remark to fall back upon it. Her mind and heart were full. She was profoundly affected by the kindness that had been shown to her. Hence she piles up her representation. "*Also, —so may I well speak, —"for he said to me.*" **Keep close by my young men, until they have finished all my harvest.** The "young men" are not here discriminated from the "young women" (see ver. 8). The idea, consequently, is not that Ruth was to keep close to them in distinction from the young women. It was understood that she should work behind the young women, who followed in the rear of the young men. But it was the express desire of Boaz that, instead of exposing herself among strangers, on any adjoining harvest-fields, she should maintain her position behind his reapers as long as there remained any golden crops to reap.

Ver. 22.—**And Naomi said to Ruth her daughter-in-law, It is good, my daughter, that thou shouldst go with his young women, and that thou be not set upon in another field.** Here again we have the archaic repetition, "Ruth her daughter-in-law." Naomi was grateful for Boaz's invitation. Compliance with it would be "good," both immediately and prospectively. In particular, it would save Ruth from running the risk of being rudely handled by utter, and perhaps rough and unprincipled, strangers. "It is good," says Naomi, "that 'they' do not set upon thee in another field." She says "they," but allows the parties she had

in view to remain, dimly visible, in the shade. No doubt, however, she refers to the reapers, binders, gleaners, and other workers who might have to be encountered "in another field." "Meaning," says homely Richard Bernard, "some lewd and lustful men whom Naomi would not so much as make mention of." The verb **שָׁמַר** is often rendered in our English version *fall upon*. It originally means to *light upon*, whether for good or for evil.

Ver. 23.—**And she kept close by Boaz's young women to glean.** Wright translates thus: "And she kept gleaning along with the maidens of Boaz." But the maidens of Boaz are not represented as gleaning. The historical statement of the verse is to be explained from the hortatory statement of ver. 8: "Keep close to my young women." **Till the end of the barley-harvest and the wheat-harvest.** Ruth's gleanings extended to the close of the wheat-harvest, during which time, no doubt, there would be frequent opportunities for a growing intimacy between the beautiful gleaner and the worthy proprietor. Often too, we may rest assured, would Boaz be a visitor in the humble home of Naomi. "The harvest upon the mountains," says Dr. Robinson, "ripens of course later than in the plains of the Jordan and the sea-coast. The barley-harvest precedes the wheat-harvest by a week or fortnight. On the 4th and 5th of June the people of Hebron were just beginning to gather their wheat; on the 11th and 12th the threshing-floors on the Mount of Olives were in full operation. We had already seen the harvest in the same stage of progress on the plains of Gaza on the 19th of May; while at Jericho, on the 12th of May, the threshing-floors had nearly completed their work" ('Biblical Researches,' vol. ii. p. 99). "The Syrian harvest," says Dr. W. M. Thomson, "extends through several months. On the plain of Philistia it commences in April and ends in June; and this not only gives ample time, but it has this great advantage, that the villagers from the mountains can assist the farmers on the plain, since their own crops are not yet ripe. I was struck with this fact while at Mesmia. Several Christians from Bethlehem, who had thus come to reap, spent the evening at my tent, and one of them explained to me the advantages from thus labouring on the plain. He not only received wages for his own and his wife's labour, but his children were permitted to follow after them and glean on their own account, as Boaz allowed Ruth to do in their native village" ('The Land and the Book,' p. 544). When it is said, in the last clause of the verse, **and she dwelt with her mother-in-law**, the reference is not to be restricted to the time that succeeded the period of

harvesting. The Vulgate indeed connects the clause with the following verse, and renders it, "After she returned to her mother-in-law," pointing the verb thus *וָשָׁבָה* instead of *וָשָׁבָה*. The same translation is given to the verb by Luther and Coverdale. But there is no evidence whatever that Ruth

slept anywhere else than under her mother-in-law's roof. The clause was written, apparently, for the very purpose of bringing out clearly before the mind of the reader her stainless innocence, and sweet simplicity, and never-tiring devotion to her noble mother-in-law.

### HOMILETICS.

Vers. 18—23.—*Home from the harvest-field.* Evening begins to draw her curtains around the little city of Bethlehem. Let us look on this picture, and on that. 1. "On this picture." See Naomi. She is wistfully and longingly looking out for her daughter-in-law's return. So many a matron looks, evening after evening, for the safe return of her husband, her son, her daughter. 2. "And on that." See Ruth toiling slowly along under her "ephah." Her strength is taxed; yet she is thankful for the precious burden. She is picturing to herself the reception she would receive under the lowly roof of her mother-in-law, and ruminating pleasantly on the cheer which both herself and her burden would bring to the anxious heart of the dear old lady. She is happy, though fatigued. Happy are all other bread-winners who, amid the monotony and weariness of daily toil, are cheered with the prospect of ministering to the comfort of wife, mother, grandmother or grandfather, sick sister perhaps, or little children. 3. At length the long-looked-for gleaner arrives. What a glad welcome she receives!—a model welcome, hearty and animating, such as should always be accorded to the good and faithful bread-winner. See with what pride and gratitude she lets slip off her burden into the hands of Naomi. We read, "And her mother-in-law beheld what she had gleaned" (ver. 18). What a looking, what a gazing there would be. *All that, my daughter? What a wonderful gleaner you must be! How could you gather all that? How good to us has Yahveh been! Here is good food for days to come.* In this matter of gratitude millions should be as conspicuous as Naomi. "Goodness and mercy" have accompanied them all the days of their life. "A table has been spread for them" every day of every year. In looking back over life, for ten, twenty, forty, sixty years, they cannot remember one single day when they had no food to eat. Even in heathen lands "God has not left himself without witness, in that *he does good*, and gives rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling men's hearts with food and gladness" (Acts xiv. 17). Every year is "crowned by him with his goodness" (Ps. lxx. 11). 4. When Naomi's spirit had become somewhat calmed, and she was about, as we may suppose, to prepare a portion of the gleanings for their simple evening repast, Ruth produced what she had "left over" of her delicious "parched corn." "She brought forth, and gave to her, what she had left over after she was satisfied" (ver. 18). Naomi's astonishment, gratitude, delight would mount up rapidly. She could restrain herself no longer. "Where hast thou gleaned to-day? and where hast thou worked? May he who took notice of thee be blessed!" "She doth here," says Dr. Thomas Fuller, "dart out and ejaculate a prayer, and that at rovers, aiming at no particular mark. '*Blessed be he who took notice of thee.*' Yet, no doubt, was it not in vain; but God made it light on the head of bountiful Boaz, who deserved it." It seems to be in the nature of all great gratitude to ascend to God in praise or prayer. For indeed "every good and perfect gift cometh down from him" (James i. 17). 5. Ruth did not keep her mother-in-law in suspense. "She showed her with whom she had worked; and she said, The name of the man with whom I worked to-day is Boaz" (ver. 19). It augurs well for both daughters and mothers when there are unreserved intercommunications between them. But mothers would require to be confidential if they would have their daughters to be confiding. There will be danger of tragedies in the home if daughters are reticent in reference to the affairs that are of chief concern at once to their own hearts and to the hearts of their parents. The tragedies will be more tragic still if husbands and sons have haunts of which mention cannot be made in the bosom of domestic confidence. "Boaz!" The name would thrill through Naomi. It instantaneously recalled tender memories

of the past ; and side by side with these recollections there flitted in before her view visions of the future. But her first utterance was a benison, no longer shot "at rovers." She gratefully lifted aloft her heart, and said, "Blessed of the Lord be he, who has not let go his kindness to the living and to the dead" (ver. 20). He had, it seems, been kind to her and hers long ago. The recollection came fresh to her mind. And now there was abundant and gratifying evidence that he was not "weary of well-doing." He had still the old kind heart, perhaps kinder than ever. With "Boaz" as the theme of conversation, there would not be in all Bethlehem a brighter or happier home that evening than the humble cot of Naomi. The genealogical relationship and former kindnesses of their worthy friend would be fully elucidated (ver. 20), and Ruth would be sure to dwell at length on the invitation she had received to continue in his fields all the harvest through (ver. 21). The evening would glide rapidly on. While they talked, and while, in the intervals of talk, they "mused," the fire within the breast would burn. As it burned, the flame would flicker, now to this side, now to that, but still ever upward toward God. Boaz had said to Ruth—and her heart responded heartily as he said it—that it was under the wings of the God of Israel that she had come to cower and be covered. She had come, he said, to "trust" in Yahveh. She was resolved that she would. Even Naomi would encourage her, and would herself be disposed to revert to the sweet significance of her own name—*Jah is sweet, and deals sweetly*. The hard thoughts which she had been tempted in the time of her anguish to entertain would be sensibly beginning to thaw and melt. And if one could have read the hearts of both, as at length they laid themselves down to rest, perhaps the thoughts of each might have been found to be running in the strain of the words of a great descendant, as he said and sang, "Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased. I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep : for thou, Lord, only makest me dwell in safety" (Ps. iv. 6—8). "Tired nature's sweet restorer" would not need to be sedulously wooed, on the part of the gleaner at least ; and if Naomi's slumber was not so easily obtained, or so uninterruptedly retained, yet she would "commune with her own heart on her bed, and be still." May we not assume that, when both awoke in the early morning, they were "still with God" ?

### HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 20.—*Kindred and kindness*. When Naomi and Ruth returned to Bethlehem they could scarcely have found friends there, but they found kinsmen. They do not seem, in their circumstances, to have sought assistance from relatives, or even to have brought themselves under the notice of such. Still, Naomi had not lost sight of Elimelech's family connections ; and when the name of Boaz was mentioned, she recognised it as the name of one of her husband's nearest kindred.

I. KINDRED IS A DIVINE INSTITUTION. Men have many artificial associations ; bonds of sympathy, and of locality, and of common occupation bind them together. But kindred is the Divine, the natural tie.

II. KINDRED IS AT THE FOUNDATION OF SOCIAL AND POLITICAL LIFE. The patriarchal economy was the earliest. The family is the first social unit, out of which springs the tribe, the clan, the nation.

III. KINDRED INVOLVES AN OBLIGATION TO CONSIDERATION AND REGARD. We cannot always cherish feelings of congeniality or of respect with reference to all who are our kindred according to the flesh. But relatives should not lose sight of one another—should not, if it can be avoided, be estranged from one another.

IV. KINDRED MAY, IN CERTAIN CASES, INVOLVE THE DUTY OF PRACTICAL HELP. Christian wisdom must here be called in to the counsels of Christian kindness.

V. KINDRED IS SUGGESTIVE AND EMBLEMATIC OF DIVINE RELATIONS. Apart from human relationship, how could we conceive of God as our Father ? of Christ Jesus as our elder Brother ? of Christians as our brethren and sisters in a spiritual family ?—T.

Ver. 23.—*Harvest-time*. This Book of Ruth is emphatically the book of the husbandman. It pictures the barley-harvest and the wheat-harvest of ancient days.



The primitive manners and usages are interesting, and deserve attentive study. But harvest—as here so vividly brought before us—is full of lessons of a spiritual kind. *E. g.*—

I. HARVEST WITNESSES TO THE ATTRIBUTES OF THE DIVINE CREATOR. To his power and wisdom. To his goodness. To his faithfulness to his promise: “Seed-time and harvest shall not cease.”

II. HARVEST IS A SUMMONS TO MAN’S GRATITUDE AND CONFIDENCE.

III. HARVEST IS SUGGESTIVE OF GREAT SPIRITUAL TRUTHS. There is a moral harvest in the history of the human character and of human society. Seed and soil are presumed. Development and growth are evidenced. The law operates: “Whosoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.” The fruit is matured and gathered in. The Husbandman—God himself—is interested in the result. To us the result is infinitely important.—T.

Ver. 20.—“Who hath not left off his kindness to the living and the dead.” The prayers of the poor for their helpers are very precious. Naomi remembers the former kindnesses that Boaz had shown to the husband of her youth and to her two boys.

I. HERE IS CONTINUITY OF CHARACTER. Some leave off kindness because they meet with experiences of ingratitude and callousness. The once warm deep within them is frozen up by these wintry experiences. But as God continues his mercy through all generations, so those who are followers of God as dear children walk in love; that is, it becomes the spirit and habit of their lives. Boaz had not left off his kindness. Ruth now drinks at the same fountain of considerate care that had refreshed Elimelech.

II. HERE IS THE GOOD WORD OF A MOTHER. It is well when the mother *respects* the man who may become allied in marriage to one who is akin to her. Naomi says to her daughter, “Blessed be he of the Lord.” Let those who have become sceptical concerning Christianity ask themselves this: Whether should I like to give my child in marriage to a Christian or an infidel? This practical query would suggest many thoughts tending to renewed faith, and would stifle for ever many superficial doubts.—T.

## EXPOSITION.

### CHAPTER III.

Ver. 1.—And Naomi, her mother-in-law, said to her, My daughter, shall not I seek out for thee a rest, that it may be well with thee? When Ruth had nothing more to do on the harvest-fields, where Boaz appeared daily, and was unremittingly gracious to her, she may have fallen into a pensive mood. Naomi was quick to note the varying ‘*nuances*’ of feeling, and said “My daughter, shall I not seek out for thee a rest?” The expression *rest*, or *resting-place*, though in itself of generic import, was, when used in such circumstances as environed Ruth, quite specific in application, and would be at once understood. It was a *home* to which Naomi pointed, a home for her daughter’s heart. In such a home, if warm and pure, there would be repose for the affections. “That it may be well with thee,” or, “which shall (or may) be good for thee.” Either translation is warrantable and excellent. The latter is the most simple, and is given by Carpzov and Rosenmüller; but the former is in accordance with a frequent idiomatic use of the expression, in which there is a change from the *relative in result* to the *relative in*

*aim*, so that *אֶשְׁכֵּן לָךְ מָנוּחַ* is equivalent to *אֶשְׁכֵּן לָךְ מָנוּחַ* (see Deut. iv. 40; vi. 3, 18; x. 11, 25, 28). Naomi did not distinguish between *rests* that would be ‘good,’ and other *rests* which would not be ‘good.’ Nor did she moralise on the idea of a *rest*, and affirm that it would be ‘good’ for her widowed daughter-in-law. She assumed that every true *rest* was ‘good,’ and, on the basis of that assumption, she sought out one for her devoted Ruth. Hence the superiority of the rendering that expresses *aim* to that which expresses the mere prediction of *result*.

Ver. 2.—And now is not Boaz, with whose young women thou wast, our relative? Naomi opens her case. She had been studying Boaz all through the harvest season. She had been studying Ruth too. She saw unmistakable evidence of mutual responsiveness and attachment. And now she had a matured scheme in her head. Hence she brings up Boaz’s name at once, and says, “Is he not our relative?” *מוֹרֵתָהּ*, an abstract term used concretely, meaning literally “acquaintance,” but here “relative,” or “kinsman” (see ch. ii. 1). *Lo he is*

winnowing barley on the threshing-floor to-night. Literally, "Lo, he is winnowing the threshing-floor of barley." The Hebrews could idiomatically speak of "the threshing-floor of barley," meaning "the threshing-floor-ful of barley." The barley lay heaped up in Boaz's threshing-floor, and he was engaged in winnowing it. He threw up against the wind the mingled mass that was on his floor, after the stalks had been carefully trodden or beaten. "Not far," says Dr. Horatio Hackett, "from the site of ancient Corinth, I passed a heap of grain, which some labourers were employed in winnowing. They used for throwing up the mingled wheat and chaff a three-pronged wooden fork, having a handle three or four feet long" ('Illustrations,' p. 106). "The winnowing," says Dr. Kitto, "was performed by throwing up the grain with a fork against the wind, by which the chaff and broken straw were dispersed, and the grain fell to the ground. The grain was afterwards passed through a sieve to separate the morsels of earth and other impurities, and it then underwent a final purification by being tossed up with wooden scoops, or short-handed shovels, such as we see sculptured on the monuments of Egypt" ('Illustrations,' *in loc.*, p. 40). In some of the Egyptian sculptures the winnowers are represented as having scoops in both hands. מְנִיָּה, *to-night* (Scotticé, "*the night*"). The agriculturist in Palestine and the surrounding districts would often carry on his winnowing operations after sunset, taking advantage of the evening breeze that then blows. The Chaldee Targumist makes express reference to this breeze, explaining the word *to-night* as meaning *in the wind which blows by night*.

Ver. 3. — So then wash thyself, and anoint thyself, and dress thyself. This latter phrase is in the original, "and put thy garments on thee." The verb מְשַׁחֲךָ, with its final yod, was the archaic form of the second person feminine, though still much cut down and contracted from its oldest form. See Raabe's "Zurückführung," and note the conduct of the verb, in its relation to the pronominal suffixes, when these are affixed. And go down to the threshing-floor. The town of Bethlehem lay on the summit of "the narrow ridge of a long gray hill" (Stanley's 'Sinai and Palestine,' p. 163), while the corn-fields, that gave the fortified place its name of *Bread-town*, stretched out expandingly in the valleys below. Dr. Robinson says, "We ascended gradually toward Bethlehem around the broad head of a valley running N.E. to join that under Mâr Elyâs. The town lies on the E. and

N.E. slope of a long ridge; another deep valley, Wady Ta'âmirah, being on the south side, which passes down north of the Frank Mountain toward the Dead Sea, receiving the valley under Mâr Elyâs not far below. Toward the west the hill is higher than the village, and then sinks down very gradually toward Wady Ahmed" ('Biblical Researches,' vol. ii. p. 158). Let not your presence be known to the man before he has finished eating and drinking. It would have been imprudent and impolitic to have discovered her presence while his servants and himself were busied in operations which required to be actively prosecuted while the breeze was favourable, and the light of the moon serviceable. Ruth was to wait till the servants, having finished their work and their repast, had retired to their respective homes. The master, as Naomi knew, would remain gratefully and joyfully on the spot, to keep watch in the midst of his cereal treasures, and under the still magnificence of the broad canopy of heaven. Speaking of Hebron, Dr. Robinson says, "Here we needed no guard around our tent. The owners of the crops came every night and slept upon their threshing-floors to guard them, and this we had found to be universal in all the region of Gaza. We were in the midst of scenes precisely like those of the Book of Ruth, when Boaz winnowed barley in his threshing-floor, and laid himself down at night to guard the heap of corn" ('Biblical Researches,' vol. ii. p. 446). Boaz's heart, when all was quiet around him, would be full of calm and comfort. He would pace about his well-heaped threshing-floor contentedly, contemplatively; and, as he paced, and thought, and adored, the figure of the beautiful and industrious gleaner might persist in coming in within the field of meditation. It might linger there, and be gladly allowed to linger.

Ver. 4. — And let it be, when he lies down, that thou take note of the place where he lies; and go, and uncover the parts about his feet, and lay thee down; and he shall declare to thee what thou shalt do. The denominative word מְנִיָּה, freely rendered in King James's version "his feet"—we have rendered "the parts about his feet." It is the exact opposite of מְנִיָּה, which never means "his head," but is always translated correctly either "his pillows" or "his bolster." It denotes "the supports on which the head was laid in lying;" and מְנִיָּה, having reference to members of the body which do not need such supports as the head, simply means "the places occupied by the feet." Naomi ventured on a bold expedient to bring speedy 'rest' to her daughter-in-law. But we

assume that, with unmistakable feminine intuition, she saw, on the one hand, that Boaz was already deeply attached to Ruth, and, on the other, that Ruth reciprocated his attachment with pure intensity. Most probably we should also assume that she detected in Boaz a peculiar diffidence that caused him to shrink from making decisive advances in the way of declaring his affection. He had, however, unconsciously revealed himself, and made it clear to Naomi that he wished to divulge in words the depth of his honourable feelings. But again and again, as we may suppose, his sensitiveness overcame his resolutions. Hence Naomi's scheme to bring him to the point of declaration. It would have been reprehensible in the extreme had she not been absolutely certain of his wishes, on the one hand, and of his perfect honour and uncontaminable purity on the other. And even with that qualification, the scheme would have been imprudent and improper, and utterly unfeminine, had it not been the case that, in virtue of an ancient and much-prized Hebrew law, Ruth was entitled to call upon her nearest of kin to fulfil the various duties of a responsible kinsman. Still, notwithstanding the existence of this law, we may rest assured that the sensitive gleaner would never have summoned up courage to ask Boaz to discharge to her the duties of kinship, unless she had been sure that the thrills that vibrated within her own heart were responsive to subtle touches, on his part, of spirit with spirit.

Ver. 5.—*And she said, All that thou sayest I will do.* There is no need for adopting into the text the K'ri "to me," after the expression "All that thou sayest." It is a mere "tittle," indeed, whether we omit or insert the pronoun; yet it was not found in the manuscripts that lay before the Septuagint and Vulgate translators.

Vers. 6, 7.—*And she went down to the threshing-floor, and did according to all that her mother-in-law had enjoined. And Boaz ate and drank, and his heart was comfortable; and he went to lie down at the end of the heap; and she came softly, and uncovered the parts about his feet, and laid herself down.* The translation in King James's version, "and his heart was merry," is perhaps stronger than there is any occasion for. The word rendered "was merry,"—viz., *נָחַם*—is literally "was good." The Septuagint word is *ἡγαθύνθη*. After the labours of the evening, Boaz had a relish for his simple repast. It was good to him. Hence he ate and drank to his heart's content, enjoying with grateful spirit the bounties of a gracious Providence. By and by he retired to rest, amid visions perchance of a brightened home, which just helped to reflect on his conscious-

ness a stronger resolution than he had ever formed before to make known his affection. At length he slept. The Syriac translator adds interpretatively, "in a sweet sleep or the floor." Ruth then stopped cautiously forth to play her delicate part. She stole softly to the sheltered spot where he lay. She gently uncovered the margin of the cloak, which lay over the place where his feet were laid. She laid herself down noiselessly. The Arabic translator adds, "and slept beside him"—a most unhappy interpretation. Nothing but sin would be so far away as sleep from the eyes, and mind, and heart of the anxious sutor.

Ver. 8.—*And it came to pass at midnight that the man started in a fright; and he bent himself over, and lo, a woman was lying at his feet.* He had awaked, and, feeling something soft and warm at his feet, he was startled and affrighted. What could it be? In a moment or two he recovered his self-possession, and bending himself up and over, or "*crooking himself*," to see and to feel, lo, a woman was lying at his feet. The Chaldean Targumist tumbles into a ludicrous bathos of taste when endeavouring to emphasise the startle and shiver which Boaz experienced. He says, "*He trembled, and his flesh became soft as a turnip from the agitation.*" How could the most peddling and paltering of Rabbis succeed in betraying himself into such a laughable puerility and absurdity? The explanation, though of course it is not the least atom of justification, lies in the fact that the Chaldean word for "turnip" is *תַּפְּלָה*, while the verb that denotes "he bent himself" is the niphal of *נָחַם*. The use of the expression "the man," in this and several of the adjoining verses, is apt to grate a little upon English ears. Let us explain and vindicate the term as we may, the grating is still felt. No matter though we know that "the rank is but the guinea stamp," the grating is felt inevitably. It is a result of that peculiar growth in living language that splits generic terms into such as are specific or semi-specific. We have *gentleman* as well as *man*, and embarrassment is not infrequently the result of our linguistic wealth. In the verse before us, and in some of those that go before, we should be disposed, in our English idiom, to employ the proper name: "And it came to pass at midnight that 'Boaz' started in a fright."

Ver. 9.—*And he said, Who art thou? And she said, I am Ruth, thy handmaid; and thou hast spread thy wings over thy handmaid, for thou art kinsman.* The Syriac translator spoils the question of Boaz by metamorphosing it from "Who art thou?" into "What is thy message?" Tremulous would be the voice of Ruth as she replied,

"I am Ruth, thy handmaid." What she said in continuance has been very generally, and by Driver, among others ('Hebrew Tenses,' p. 136), misapprehended. Not by Raabe, however. It has been regarded as a petition presented to Boaz—"Spread thy wings (or, *thy wing*) over thy handmaid, for thou art kinsman." The literal translation, however, and far the more delicate idea, as also far the more effective representation, is, "And thou hast spread thy wings over thy handmaid, for thou art kinsman." Ruth explains her position under Boaz's coverlet as if it were his own deliberate act. Such is her felicitous way of putting the case. It is as if she had said, "The position in which thy handmaid actually exhibits the true relation in which thou standest to thy handmaid. She is under thy wings. Thou hast benignantly spread them over her, for thou art kinsman." The Masorites have correctly regarded כנפי as a *scriptio defectiva* for the dual of the noun, and hence have punctuated it כנפֿי, "thy wings." The majority of interpreters, however, have assumed that the word is singular, and have hence translated it as if it had been punctuated כנף. The dual reading is to be preferred. Boaz himself had represented Ruth as having come trustfully under the wings of Yahveh (see ch. ii. 12). She accepted the representation. It was beautifully true. But, as she was well aware that God often works through human agency, she now recognised the Divine hand in the kindness of Boaz. "*Thou hast spread thy wings over thine handmaid.*" She was under his wings because she had come under the wings of Yahveh. She felt like a little timid chicken; but she had found a refuge. It is the wings of tender, gentle, sheltering care that are referred to. There is only indirect allusion to the typical coverlet under which she lay. For thou art kinsman (see ch. ii. 20). The native modesty of Ruth led her to account for her position by a reference to the law of kinship. She had rights, and she stood upon them. She conceived that Boaz had correlative duties to discharge; but we may be sure that she would never have made the least reference to her rights, or to the correlative duties which she regarded as devolving on Boaz, had she not known that his heart was already hers.

Ver. 10.—And he said, Blessed be thou of Yahveh, my daughter; thou hast made thy latter kindness better than the former, in not going after any young man, whether poor or rich. This verse is full of satisfactory evidence that Naomi was perfectly right in conjecturing that Boaz, deep in love, was restrained only by diffidence from formally declaring himself. It shows us too that the chief ground of his diffidence was his age.

RUTH.

He had been an acquaintance, and the equal in years, of Ruth's father-in-law, Elimelech, and the impression had got hold on him that the handsome young widow might feel repugnance to his suit. Hence, instead of being in the least degree offended by the steps she had taken, he was relieved, and felt full of gratification on the one hand, and of gratitude on the other. Blessed be thou by Yahveh. Literally, "to Yahveh," i. e. "in relation to Yahveh" (see ch. ii. 20). My daughter. His relative elderliness was in his mind. Thou hast made thy latter kindness better than the former. Michaelis has seized the true meaning of these words: "The kindness which thou art showing to thy husband, now that he is gone, is still greater than what thou didst show to him while he lived." Her employment of the word "kinsman," or *goel*, was evidence to Boaz that she was thinking of the respect which she owed to her husband's memory. Her concern in discharging that duty of 'piety' struck the heart of Boaz; and all the more so, in his opinion, she might easily have found open doors, had she wished for them, in quarters where there was no connection of kinship with her deceased husband. "She did not go after any young man, whether poor or rich." She preferred, above all such, her first husband's elderly "kinsman." In the original the construction is peculiar—"in not going after the young men, whether a poor one or a rich one." He does not simply mean that she was free from vagrant courses and desires. Her character lay, to his eye, on a far higher level. His meaning is that she deliberately refrained from "thinking of any young man." The plural "young men" is to be accounted for on the principle that when an alternate is assumed or postulated, there is, in actual contemplation, a plurality of individuals.

Ver. 11.—And now, my daughter, fear not: all that thou sayest I shall do to thee, for it is on all hands known in the gate of my people that thou art a truly capable woman. The word נָחַל in the expression נָחַל אִשָּׁתִּי is of many-sided import, and has no synonym in English, German, Latin, or Greek. But every side of its import brings into view one or other or more of such affiliated ideas as *strength, force, forces, capability*—whether mental and moral only, or also financial; *competency, substantiality, ability, bravery*. All who had taken notice of Ruth perceived that she was mentally and morally, as well as physically, a *substantial and capable* woman. She was possessed of *force*, both of mind and character. She was, in the New England sense of the expression, a *woman of "faculty."* She was full of *resources*, and thus adequate to the

position which, as Boaz's wife, she would be required to fill. There was no levity about her, "no nonsense." She was earnest, industrious, virtuous, strenuous, brave. There was much of the *heroine* in her character, and thus the expression connects itself with the masculine application of the distinctive and many-sided word, "a mighty man of valour." The expression **אִישׁ חָזָק** occurs

in Prov. xii. 4, where, in King James's version, it is, as here and in Prov. xxxi. 10, translated "a virtuous woman"—"a virtuous woman is a crown to her husband." But it is not so much to *moral virtue* that there is a reference as to that general capacity which consists in "large discourse, looking before and after" ('Hamlet,' iv. 4). Compare the

masculine expression **אִישׁ חָזָק** in Exod. xviii. 21, 25, rendered, in King James's version, "able men," and meaning *capable* or *substantial men*, who, however, as we learn from the additional characteristics that are specified, were to be likewise conspicuous for high moral worth. In Prov. xxxi. 10 there is the same reference to *general capacity*, as is evidenced by the graphic representation that follows—a representation that by no means exhausts itself in the idea of *moral virtue*. Ibn Ezra takes the whole soul out of the expression when he interprets it, both here and in Proverbs, as meaning "a woman possessed of riches." When Boaz says, "All that thou sayest I will do to thee," he means, "All that thou hast so winsomely and yet so modestly referred to in what thou didst say, I am prepared to do to thee." There was only one obstacle in the way, and that of a somewhat technical description. If that should be honourably surmounted, nothing would be more agreeable to Boaz's heart than to get nearer to Ruth. "For," said he, "it is on all hands known in the gate of my people that," &c. Literally the phrase is, "for all the gate of my people know," a strangely inverted but picturesque mode of expression. It was not "the gate of the people," but "the people of the gate," that knew.

Ver. 12.—And now it is the case of a truth that while I am a kinsman, there is yet a kinsman nearer than I. Or the rendering might with greater brevity be given thus: **And now of a truth I am a kinsman; and yet there is a kinsman nearer than I.** The survivals of a very ancient style of elaborately-detailed composition are here preserved. The archaism, however, was not quite appreciated by the Mazorites, who, in accordance with the spirit of the age in which they flourished, took but little note of the philological development, historical and prehistorical, of the language they were handling. Hence they suppressed the **אִישׁ** in

K'ri, though faithfully preserving it in C'tib. The particles, standing up and semi-isolated, palaeolithic-wise, might be accounted for in some such way as is shown in the following paraphrase: "*And now* (I declare) '*that*' of a truth (it is the case) '*that if*' (I declare the whole truth) I (am) a kinsman, and also there is a kinsman nearer than I." Boaz was of that strictly honourable cast of mind that he could not for a moment entertain any project that might amount to a disregard of the rights of others, even although these rights should fly violently in the teeth of his own personal desires.

Ver. 13.—Abide here to-night; and it shall come to pass in the morning, if he will act to thee the part of a kinsman, well; he shall act the kinsman's part; and if it please him not to act to thee the kinsman's part, then sure as Yahveh is alive, I will act to thee the kinsman's part. Lie still till the morning. Love is quick-witted. Boaz's plan of operations would formulate itself on the spur of the moment; but the remainder of the night would doubtless be spent in maturing the details of procedure. The aim would be to secure, as far as honour would permit, the much-wished-for prize. There would be, moreover, we need not doubt, much conversation between them, and mutual consultation, and arrangement. A large letter, a *majuscula*, occurs in the first word of the verse—**לָיְלָה**—which the smaller Masora ascribes to the Oriental or Babylonian textualists. It had, no doubt, been at first either a merely accidental, or a finically capricious, enlargement; but, being found, mysteries had to be ex-cogitated to account for it;—all mere rubbish. "To-night" is a perfect translation of **לָיְלָה**, for the *to* is simply the common definite article in one of its peculiar forms, perhaps peculiarly crushed and defaced (see note on ch. iii. 2).

Ver. 14.—And she lay at the place of his feet until morning: and she arose ere yet a man could distinguish his neighbour. In the original it is "the places of his feet" (see ver. 4). Time would rapidly fly past. Sleep there would be none to either the one or the other. In mutual modesty they guarded each other's honour. Thoughts and feelings, narratives and projects, would be freely interchanged. Their mutual understanding would become complete. At length there began to be the first faint tinge of paleness streaking into the dark. Ruth arose, and prepared to depart. It is added, **For he had said**,—or, more literally, "And he had said,"—**Let it not be known that 'the' woman came to the threshing-floor.** This has been to critics a puzzling clause. The conjunction in the foreground, a mere

copulative, has occasioned difficulty. It is thoroughly Hebraistic. But of course it does not here introduce to notice something merely added to what goes before, of the nature of a parting injunction or request addressed to Ruth. The articulated phrase "*the woman*," as distinguished from "*a woman*," the expression in King James's version, renders such an interpretation impossible. The Targumist explains thus: "and he said to *his young men*." But the whole tenor of the preceding narrative proceeds on the assumption that there were no servants on the premises or at hand. Other Rabbis, and after them Luther and Coverdale, interpret thus: "and he said *in his heart*," or, "and he thought." Unnatural. The difficulty is to be credited, or debited, to simplicity of composition, and the habit of just adding thing to thing aggregatively; instead of interweaving them into a complex unity. In the course of their many interchanges of thought and feeling, Boaz had expressed a desire, both for Ruth's sake and for his own, that it should not be known that she had come by night to the threshing-floor. The narrator, instead of introducing this expression of desire in the way in which it would directly fall from the lips of Boaz, "Let it not be known that *thou didst* come," gives it in the indirect form of speech, the *oratio obliqua*, as his own statement of the case. It is as if he had introduced a parenthesis or added a note in the margin. The ἀπαρ λεγόμενον רִיחַם—instead of רִיחַם—was most probably not a later form, as Bertheau supposes, but an older Hebrew form that had died out of use long before the days of the Masorites.

Ver. 15.—And he said, Allow me the wrapper which is upon thee, and hold on by it; and she held on by it; and he measured six measures of barley; and he put it on her, and went to the city. The expression "Allow me," literally, "Give (me)," was a current phrase of courtesy. The verb employed—רָחַם—was common Semitic property, ere yet the mother-tongue was subdivided into Hebrew, Syriac, Chaldean, Arabic. The wrapper which is upon thee. The word for *wrapper* occurs nowhere else except in Isa. iii. 22, where it is translated, in King James's version, "wimple." Here it is rendered "vail," and, in the margin, "sheet or apron,"—all of them unhappy translations. So is the rendering of the Targumist, נָטְרָה, i. e. *sudarium*, or "napkin." N. G. Schröder discusses the word at great length in his masterly 'Commentarius Philologico-Criticus de Vestitu Mulierum Hebræarum,' pp. 247—277. He would render it *pallium* or *palla*. In consequence of national peculiarities in articles of dress, especially in

ancient times, it is best to avoid a specific, and to employ a generic translation. When Boaz said, "Give me the wrapper," he did not ask that it should be handed to him. He had already put his hand upon it, and was engaged in hollowing out a scoop or cavity. Hence he said, on the one hand, "Allow me," and, on the other, "Hold on by it." And he measured six measures of barley. The particular measure referred to is unspecified. It is not only mere dream on the part of the Targumist, but it is dream involving almost sheer impossibility, that the measures were *seahs*, i. e. two ephabs. The Targumist had to bolster up his dream by adding another, viz., that Ruth got miraculously strength to carry the load. Load, indeed, there undoubtedly was; and no doubt it would be as great as she could conveniently carry. And likewise, in accordance with the primitive simplicity of manners, the magnitude of the burden would be demonstration to Naomi of Boaz's satisfaction with the "*measures*" which, in full motherliness of spirit, she had planned. And he went to the city. The Vulgate and Syriac versions, as also Castellio, Coverdale, and various other translators, but not Luther, have assumed that we should read רָחַם, "and she went," instead of רָחַם, "and he went." So too Wright. But there seems to be no good reason for making the change. If there had been no division into verses, then the departure of both Boaz and Ruth on their respective routes, or in their respective order of sequence, would have been recorded close together: "and 'he' went to the city, and 'she' went to her mother-in-law"—each, let us bear in mind, with the heart elate.

Ver. 16.—And she went to her mother-in-law. And she said, Who art thou, my daughter? And she narrated to her all that the man had done to her. The question, "Who art thou, my daughter?" is not put by Naomi, as Drusius supposes, because it was still so dusk that she could not properly distinguish Ruth. The address, "My daughter," shows that she had no difficulty in determining who the visitor was. But there is *something arch* intended. "Art thou Boaz's betrothed?" Michaelis translates, "What art thou?" Unwarrantably as regards the letter, but correctly as regards the spirit of the interrogatory.

Ver. 17.—And she said, These six measures of barley he gave to me; for he said, Thou must not go empty to thy mother-in-law. The Ctib omission of "to me" after "for he said" is most likely to be the original reading. A fastidious Rabbi would rather originate this insertion than the omission.

Ver. 18.—And she said, Sit still, my daughter, till that thou know how the affair

will fall out, for the man will not rest unless he complete the affair to-day. In saying, "Sit still, my daughter," it is as if Naomi had said, "There is no occasion for restless anxiety. Let your heart be at ease till that thou know how the affair will fall

out." In the Hebrew the noun is without the article. But in English it must be supplied, unless a plural be employed—"how 'things' will fall out." דָּבָר, *thing*, i. e. *think*. Compare the corresponding relation between the German *sache* and *sagen*.

### HOMILETICS.

Ch. iii.—*Naomi's maternal solicitude*. This is one of those paragraphs of Scripture which require delicate handling, but which, for that very reason, are full of suggestiveness that comes home to the bosom. Under strange, old-fashioned forms of things there was often much real virtue and true nobility of character. 1. It may be regarded as certain that while the harvest lasted Boaz and Ruth would be coming daily into contact with each other. 2. It may likewise be assumed as certain that their minds would from day to day grow into one another, in interest and esteem. As intimacy increased, it would reveal, on either side, points of character that were fitted to evoke admiration and sincere respect. 3. It is reasonable to suppose that Naomi's humble home in Bethlehem would be again and again visited by Boaz. There would be various attractions. Naomi herself, as an old and now a far-travelled friend, would be able to tell much that would be interesting to the kinsman of Elimelech. 4. The Palestinian harvest season would that year, as well as on other years, be a lively time. The harvest-home, in particular, would be a joy and a rural triumph. It may well be so in all countries. The golden grain is more precious by far than grains of gold. It is emphatically the "staff" on which terrestrial life has to lean. One of the chief uses of gold is to buy from the agriculturist, directly or circuitously, for the use of those who live in towns and cities, the superfluity of cereals raised in the harvest-fields. Harvesting operations are thus always interesting and stirring. Ruth would feel an interest; and, in consequence of the hearty sympathy and favour of Boaz, her whole nature would be stirred. 5. But it is far from being improbable that when the gleaming season was ended, so that Ruth had to exchange out-of-door for indoor activities, she may have acquired, to the eye of her solicitous mother-in-law, an unusually pensive appearance. 6. Naomi would no doubt make Ruth a constant study. Every mother, every father, should make every individual child in the family circle an individual study. It is not every child, it is not every young man, or young woman, whose whole heart can be read off at a sitting. Many a mind is many-volumed. Naomi did her best day by day to understand her devoted and deeply affectionate daughter-in-law, and seems to have felt increasingly solicitous as she noticed her unwonted thoughtfulness and reticence. 7. Then we must bear in mind that in such a state of society as then prevailed in Bethlehem and Judah, there must have been extremely little scope for female energy and industry in business directions. Happily in our time there is, so far as Great Britain is concerned, considerable interest taken by philanthropic minds in the subject of female education, literary and technical. There are, moreover, even already many spheres in which females, not otherwise provided for, can find, in affairs congenial to their tastes and idiosyncrasies, remuneration and employment. In many government offices, and in other spheres of activity, females now occupy important positions. Not only do they excel in works of taste: whatever requires careful attention, combined with delicate manipulation, can be intrusted to their hands. There is still, it is true, much to be done to promote the employment and independence of single females; but a beginning has been made, and a point or two beyond that beginning have been reached. In the time and sphere of Naomi, however, there were no open doors of this kind. And hence, when she was looking out for the settlement of her daughter-in-law, she naturally thought only of a 'rest' for her in a home of her own. In reference to such a 'rest,' it is the duty of all mothers and mothers-in-law to be solicitous, though never obtrusive, in behalf of their children. Advice may be tendered, caution may be suggested; but there must be true sympathy on the one hand, and true delicacy of feeling on the other.

To turn now more particularly to Boaz—1. It is reasonable to suppose that Naomi

had noticed that he looked on Ruth with longing eyes. 2. It is also reasonable to suppose that, from some cause or other, Boaz felt himself under an unconquerable spell of reticence. The cause seems to be revealed in his use again and again of the fatherly expression, *My daughter*, as applied to Ruth. He was evidently well advanced in years. This seems to have been the soil on which his insuperable diffidence grew. How to get this diffidence plucked up by the roots was the problem which the solicitous Naomi set herself to solve. 3. There was only one way, as it appeared to her, in which Boaz's mind could be set free from the spell which put a seal on his lips. That was to bring Ruth into such relationship to him that he would learn her true sentiments on the one hand, and feel put upon his honour on the other. Naomi, to effect this consummation, took advantage of a time-honoured custom, which had come down from very remote and primitive times, and was still in full force among the Hebrews. She thought of the *Levirate law*. This was a law that gave a widow, if an heiress, the right to claim, from the nearest of kin to her deceased husband, conjugal assistance in the management of her estate. The nearest of kin, if thus appealed to for the purpose indicated, had a right to refuse the widow's claim, provided he was willing to submit to certain indignities and unpleasant formalities, such as being stripped of one of his shoes, and then twitted and hooted as *Barefoot* (Deut. xxv. 5—10). But if it should happen to be the case that his feelings were the reverse of repugnance, then the act of compliance would be at once the highest meed of respect which could be paid to the memory of the deceased, and the greatest gratification that could be enjoyed by the living. In the case of Ruth and Boaz, two just conclusions had been arrived at by Naomi. One had reference to Ruth, and was to the effect that, while it would be impossible for her to initiate action that might be regarded as terminating on herself, it would yet be both possible for and becoming in her to undertake the initiation of action that had for its aim what was due to the name and honour of her deceased husband. The other had reference to Boaz, and was to the effect that his diffidence, otherwise unconquerable, would be conquered if he were put upon his honour, and saw his way clear to discharge a duty to a deceased kinsman. 4. We must, in addition, suppose that Naomi, in making arrangement for the midnight interview, had unfaltering confidence in the incorruptible innocence of Ruth, and in the incontaminable purity of Boaz. 5. We are likewise entitled to assume that the method of claiming a kinsman's interposition, which she laid down for her daughter-in-law's guidance, was no gratuitous invention of her own. It is natural to regard it as having been the normal and accredited formula of procedure that was in use in "society," for the initiation of such measures as were requisite in the application of the *Levirate law*. 6. It is on this assumption alone that we can account for the fact that no apology was made by Ruth, and that no surprise was expressed by Boaz. Instead of surprise, there was only devout admiration of Ruth's entire demeanour in relation to her deceased husband. He said, "Blessed be thou of the Lord, my daughter; thou hast made thy latter kindness better than the former, in not going after any young man, whether poor or rich." It is her kindness to the deceased, not her kindness to himself, of which he speaks. The kindness she was showing after her husband's decease was, in Boaz's estimation, still greater than the kindness she had showed him, or had been able to show him, during his life. A woman, so attractive and so capable as she, might have readily found among the young men many open doors to rest, and ease, and affluence. But she did not for one moment wish to avail herself of any of these openings. She wished to do honour to the name and memory of her lamented Machlon, more especially in her capacity as the prospective heiress of his property. 7. We may be sure, however, that Naomi would never have availed herself of the customs that had got fixed by "use and wont" in relation to the *Levirate law*, unless she had been certain that it would be in accordance with the deepest desires of both her friends that they should get together in life.

In the light of these remarks we may now re-read the entire chapter, interposing, as we go along the successive verses, whatever expository or practical remark may seem to be called for.

Ver. 1.—There is something radically wrong in every home which is not a "rest" to its inmates; and life without a home is emphatically a life of unrest.



Vers. 2—4.—Naomi's solicitude for her devoted daughter-in-law is beautiful and motherly. But the form into which it ran and took shape can never recur in the midst of the culture and customs of European society. Even the method of winnowing the golden grain of the harvest-field, as referred to in ver. 2, is antique and obsolete. So, too, is the method which Boaz adopted to watch over his cereal treasures. He constituted himself his own watchman and policeman.

Ver. 5.—Ruth's confidence in Naomi's kindness and wisdom is noteworthy. It was no upstart prepossession and blindfold feeling. Naomi had earned it by a long-continued course of prudence and sympathy. Boaz too had earned a corresponding confidence, and hence she did not hesitate to intrust herself to his honour. She felt that she was safe.

Vers. 6, 7.—The expression "his heart was merry" just means that he felt physically comfortable, and ready for quiet and sound repose.

Ver. 8.—When it is said that "the man was afraid, and turned himself," the meaning of the latter clause, as it stands in King James's version, would require some modification. The idea is not that Boaz *turned from one side to another*, it is that, having started in a fright, in consequence of the presence, to his indistinct consciousness, of something unusual about his feet, he raised himself up and bent forward to feel what it was.

Ver. 9.—His touch had satisfied him that it was a woman who was at his feet. Who was she? Ruth at once declared herself, no doubt in accents of sweet modesty. The statement with which she follows up the declaration of herself is variously interpreted. In King James's version there are two departures from literality. 1. The word *skirt* is not a literal rendering of the Hebrew term. *Wings* is the proper translation. 2. The entreaty *Spread therefore* is also a departure from literality. The verb is not in the *imperative*, but in the *affirmative*—*And thou hast spread*. It is Ruth's own interpretation of the position of affairs. She had come to Judæa to take shelter *under the wings of Jehovah*; and Boaz had, on his part, in harmony with the heavenly kindness of Jehovah, spread over her his wings of terrestrial kindness. She thus does not speak at all of Boaz's *skirt*, or *skirts*. There was beautiful delicacy in her representation. She did not need to enter into particular details. Her position, viewed in the light of custom, explained the whole case.

Vers. 10, 11.—"And now, my daughter, fear not"—give not thyself any anxious concern in reference to the result. "All the people in the gate of my city know that thou art *a virtuous woman*." Yes, she *was* virtuous; and yet she was much more. She was endowed with all the *capacities* which fitted her for the position she was willing to occupy (see the *Exposition*).

Ver. 12.—Note the highly honourable character of Boaz. There was one nearer in kinship to Ruth than himself. This person, therefore, must receive the first offer. Had the case come before Boaz as simply one of personal affection, he would in all probability have made no reference to the nearer kinsman. But as it had come before him in its relation to the deceased, and connected itself with Ruth because of her relation to the deceased, he felt that he must act in strictest honour. There were rights of property at stake, as well as affections of the heart, and Boaz could be no party to deprive any one of such rights. Still we need not doubt that his heart thrilled at the thought that the rights involved would not prove an insurmountable barrier between himself and Ruth.

Ver. 13.—Boaz's mind still runs on the lines of a kinsman's duty. There was hence something that might be thrust in between the desires of his heart and the object toward whom they trembled.

Ver. 14.—Boaz was desirous to guard the fair name and fame of Ruth, as well as to keep untarnished his own unsullied reputation.

Ver. 15.—He wished that Naomi might have some tangible evidence of his satisfaction.

Ver. 16.—The question *Who art thou?* sprang from Naomi's hope that the entire scheme would issue in success.

Ver. 17.—The present was, in one point of view, inconsiderable; but, in another point of view, it was a most suitable gift from one who desired indeed to show sym-

pathy, gratitude, and kindness, but who did not wish, at that stage of the affair, to raise unconditioned expectation which might never be realised.

Ver. 18.—Naomi, as it were, said to Ruth and to her own heart, *Peace, peace. All will be well. All is well. The hand of the Almighty is dealing "sweetly," not "bitterly," with all the parties concerned.*

### HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 1.—*Marriage, a woman's rest.* If Ruth was unselfish, so also was Naomi. The mother-in-law acted towards the young Moabitess as if she had been her own daughter. In seeking a husband for her daughter-in-law Naomi followed the customs of her country and her age. (Our English custom is intermediate between the French custom, according to which the husband is provided by the negotiations of the parents, and the American custom, which leaves daughters to select for themselves.) The case before us was not an ordinary one. For whilst marriage was almost universally looked forward to by Hebrew youths and maidens, there were very special reasons why Naomi should seek a husband for Ruth. As is implied in the text, Naomi desired that her daughter-in-law might find in marriage with Boaz—

I. A HOME, which should be a rest from her wanderings.

II. A PROVISION, which should deliver her from the misery and the temptations of poverty.

III. HAPPINESS, which should compensate her for the sorrows of her widowhood.

IV. PIOUS COMPANIONSHIP, which should be a relief from long friendlessness.

Lessons:—1. Parents should take thought for their children, and not leave them to choose companions and friends and life-associates by chance. Nothing could be more disastrous than such neglect and thoughtlessness. 2. Marriage should be thought of with deliberation and prayer, both by the young, and by their parents or natural guardians. 3. Those who have found rest and prosperity in marriage should not omit the duty of gratitude and praise for the care and direction of Divine providence.—T.

Ver. 2.—*Diligence in business.* Boaz is an example of a thorough man of business. He was wont himself to see to it that the land was well tilled and well reaped. He was personally acquainted with the labourers. He even noticed the gleaners. He watched the reaping. He superintended the winnowing. He slept on the winnowing-floor, to protect his corn from the designs of robbers.

I. A RELIGIOUS MAN IS BOUND TO ATTEND TO THE CALLING HE EXERCISES. Whether a landowner, a farmer, a merchant, a tradesman, or a professional man, he ought to give his attention to his occupation, and not to neglect his own business to be a meddler in that of others. His business is thus more likely to prosper, and his example to younger men will be influential and beneficial.

II. AN EMPLOYER OF LABOUR IS BOUND TO STUDY THE WELFARE OF HIS SERVANTS. The present state of society is very different from that in the time of Boaz. Society is less patriarchal, and more democratic. But there is still room, both in the household and in commercial and agricultural and manufacturing life, for the exercise of wise and kindly supervision over those who are employed to labour.

III. DILIGENCE IN BUSINESS PROCURES A MAN MANY ADVANTAGES. It is foolish to despise wealth, though it is easy to over-estimate it. From the narrative it is clear that the wealth of Boaz enabled him to secure a charming and virtuous wife, gave him great consideration amongst his neighbours and fellow-townsmen. If a man neglects the opportunity of acquiring property in order to pursue learning, or to do good, he deserves respect; but if from sloth and heedlessness, he is despised. Wealth is good if it be used for good purposes—for the education of children, for the encouragement of learning and virtue, for the well-being of the people at large.—T

Vers. 5, 6.—*Filial obedience.* Ruth was not Naomi's daughter, yet she acted, and with good reason and great propriety, as though she had been such. What holds good, therefore, of the relationship described in this book holds good, *à fortiori*, of the relation between parents and children. In modern society the bonds of parental

discipline are, especially among the working class, lamentably relaxed. Christian people should, in the interests alike of patriotism and religion, do all they can to strengthen these bonds. The text affords us a beautiful example of filial obedience.

I. MOTIVES TO filial obedience. Gratitude should lead the child to obey the parent, to whom he owes so very much. The constraint should be the sweet constraint of love. Reason should lead to the reflection—The parent has experience of human life, in which I am necessarily lacking; is not a parent's judgment far more likely to be sound than is a child's, or even a youth's? Divine legislation commands children to obey their parents. *E. g.* the fifth commandment, under the old covenant; apostolical admonitions, under the new. The example of the Holy Child, Jesus!

II. The ADVANTAGES of filial obedience. Usually, obvious temporal advantages ensue upon such a course. This is proverbial and unquestionable. The satisfaction of a good conscience is a compensation not to be despised for any sacrifice of personal feeling in this matter. The approval of God is most emphatically pronounced upon those who honour and obey their parents. And this is usually followed by the confidence and admiration of fellow-men.

Lessons:—1. Expostulate with the disobedient. 2. Encourage the obedient.—T.

Ver. 7.—*The joy of harvest.* There is brightness and pleasantness in the view this passage gives us of a harvest-time in the vale of Bethlehem. Poets and painters have interpreted the heart of humanity in the pictures and the songs in which they have represented "the joy of harvest." Boaz, the mighty man of wealth, was not only rich and prosperous—he was happy, and free from the moroseness which sometimes accompanies riches; he was generous, and free from the miserliness and penuriousness which often grows with prosperity; he was considerate, and observed and recognised individual cases of need.

I. IT IS RIGHT TO PARTAKE OF THE BOUNTIES OF GOD'S PROVIDENCE. Gluttony and drunkenness meet with no encouragement from this, or from any other portion of Scripture. But no countenance is given to asceticism. God "daily loadeth us with benefits;" he giveth not only seed to the sower, but "bread to the eater." We should eat, drink, and give thanks to him who "openeth his hand and satisfieth the wants of every living thing." Sincerity and thoughtfulness should accompany the daily blessing and breaking of bread. Christ "came eating and drinking."

II. IT IS RIGHT TO BE HAPPY AND MIRTHFUL WHEN GOD HAS DEALT BOUNTIFULLY WITH US. There is mirth of a kind attending the carousals and the debaucheries of sinners. This mirth is hollow, and will soon be succeeded by regrets. But when God's children sit at their Father's table and partake of his bounty, what more natural and just than that they should rejoice and sing aloud of his goodness? These gifts and "all things" are theirs!

III. IT IS RIGHT TO REST WHEN DUTY HAS BEEN FULFILLED AND TASKS ACHIEVED. Some zealous Christians seem to think all repose is sinful, as manifesting indifference to the magnitude of the work to be done. But God has made the body so that it needs rest, the mind so that it needs relaxation. The quality of the work will not suffer, but will gain, by timely and moderate repose.—T.

Ver. 10.—*Benediction.* A blessing comes appropriately from a senior; a father blesses his son, a venerable patriarch his youthful colleague. Boaz was an elderly man, and it seems appropriate that, addressing Ruth, the young widow of his kinsman, he should use language of benediction: "Blessed be thou of the Lord, my daughter!"

I. BENEDICTION PROCEEDS FROM A BENEVOLENT DISPOSITION. It is the opposite of cursing. Sometimes language of benediction is used when there is no spiritual reality behind it. In such cases it is a mockery, a counterfeit of benevolence and piety.

II. BENEDICTION IMPLIES PIETY. Belief in God, and in God's willingness to bless. There is a looking up to God on behalf of him who is to be blessed. Without this the language of blessing is meaningless.

III. BENEDICTION IS THE ACKNOWLEDGMENT THAT FROM GOD ALL GOOD MUST COME, COMBINED WITH THE DESIRE AND PRAYER THAT HE WILL BE GRACIOUS. It is the hallow-

ing of our best affections; it is the making real and personal of our most solemn religious beliefs.

IV. BENEDICTION, IF HARMONIOUS WITH GOD'S WILL, SECURES GOD'S FAVOUR. It is a wish, but a wish realised; a prayer, but a prayer heard and answered in heaven.—T.

Ver. 11.—*A virtuous woman.* The circumstances of the narrative read strangely to us. But one nation and one age cannot fairly apply its standards to another. Nothing is more certain than that the conduct of Naomi, of Ruth, and of Boaz was perfectly correct, and probably Ruth's proceeding was wise and justifiable. Upon her character no breath of suspicion rested; she was, in the language of the text, "a virtuous woman."

I. RUTH'S VIRTUE WAS MANIFESTED BY HER CIRCUMSPECT CONDUCT WITH REFERENCE TO YOUNG MEN. "Thou followedst not young men, whether rich or poor."

II. HER VIRTUE WAS APPARENT IN HER OBEDIENCE TO HER MOTHER-IN-LAW. Instead of taking counsel of her own comparative inexperience, she listened to the advice of the sage and prudent Naomi.

III. HER VIRTUE WAS ACKNOWLEDGED BY ALL HER ACQUAINTANCE. "All the city of my people doth know." If there had been anything in the conduct of the poor, friendless young foreigner inconsistent with virtue, it would not have been hid. She escaped calumny.

IV. HER VIRTUE LED TO AN HONOURABLE MARRIAGE AND POSITION IN ISRAEL. "A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband." We can believe that Ruth verified the beautiful description given in Prov. xxxi.—T.

Vers. 12, 13.—*Respect for others' rights.* The situation in which Boaz found himself was very singular. All that he had heard and all that he had observed of this young Moabitess had impressed him favourably. His language and his conduct show that Ruth had made an impression upon his heart. And it was honourable to him that it was so. Her youth, her beauty, her misfortunes, her industry, her cheerfulness, her filial devotedness, her virtue, her piety, all commended her to the judgment and the affections of the upright and conscientious Boaz. And now, with the most perfect modesty, and in the presentation of an undoubted claim upon him, Ruth offered herself to him as his lawful, rightful wife. What hindered him from immediately complying with her request, and taking her to his heart and his home? There was one impediment. Another had, if he chose to exercise it, a prior claim. Another had the first right to redeem the field of Elimelech, and to espouse the heiress, and raise up seed to the departed. And until this person—the nameless one—had exercised his option, Boaz did not feel at liberty to act upon the suggestion of his heart.

I. PERSONAL FEELINGS ALWAYS INCREASE THE URGENCY OF THE CLAIMS OF SELFISHNESS. "By nature and by practice" men seek their own interest. But experience shows us that strong emotion increases the danger of our yielding to such impulses.

II. WHERE PERSONAL FEELINGS ARE CONCERNED THERE IS NEED OF WATCHFULNESS AND PRAYER. It is so easy to wrong others for the sake of our own gratification, that it is well to question the arguments and pleas by which our interests are commended. Boaz must have been tempted, in the circumstances, to say nothing about the nearer kinsman, but quietly to accept the proposal of Ruth.

III. TRUE PRINCIPLE, AIDED BY THE POWER OF RELIGION, WILL ENABLE A MAN TO DO THE RIGHT, EVEN THOUGH HIS OWN INTERESTS AND HIS OWN FEELINGS ARE OPPOSED TO SUCH A COURSE. Boaz gained the victory over himself, and consented to abide the issue of an appeal to the nearer kinsman, although he risked thereby the loss of Ruth. Many of the highest illustrations of the nobility possible to man turn upon some such situation, and the course which honour and virtue prescribe is the course in which true and lasting happiness will be found.—T.

Vers. 15—17.—*Generosity.* Boaz was "a mighty man of wealth," and Naomi and Ruth were poor, widowed, friendless, and comparatively strangers. All through the narrative Boaz appears as thoughtful, liberal, unselfish, honourable, munificent. He is an example to those whom Providence has endowed with wealth.

I. WEALTH IS GIVEN TO THE RICH not for their own sake only, but FOR THE SAKE OF OTHERS. Men are not the owners, but the stewards, of their possessions. How imperfectly this truth is recognised! The only way in which we can give to Christ is by giving to his people.

II. GENEROSITY SHOULD BE PROPORTIONATE TO THE MEANS OF THE GIVER. Both his means absolutely and his means relatively, i. e. considering the claims upon him by virtue of his family, his position, &c.

III. GENEROSITY SHOULD BE PROPORTIONATE TO THE NEEDS OF THE RECIPIENT. Those should have the preference who are old, crippled, and helpless; the widow and the orphan.

IV. GENEROSITY SHOULD BE UNOSTENTATIOUS AND SYMPATHETIC in its spirit. "Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth." Hardness of manner may spoil beneficence. "Rich gifts wax poor when givers prove unkind."—T.

Ver. 18.—*Sit still!* Naomi showed in her whole conduct not only tender feeling and sympathy, and sincere piety, but much shrewdness, foresight, tact, and knowledge of human nature. When there was anything for Ruth to do she was forward in urging her to action. But she knew that there is always a time to wait, as well as a time to work; and she reminded Ruth that now events must be left to others—indeed, must be left to God!

I. THE OCCASION for sitting still. According to some, the belief that God works is inconsistent with the obligation to work ourselves. The whole idea of the religious life, as apprehended by some mistaken minds, is to do nothing, and to leave God to do everything. And some, who do not go so far as this, still are blind to the privilege of being "workers together with God." When we have done our part, then is the time to sit still. The workman has first to labour, then to rest. The day of toil comes first, and the night of repose follows. When we can do no more, then is the time to sit still. Ask yourself whether you have or have not this reason for refraining from effort. We sometimes come to the end of our ability; we have done our part, and for us nothing now remains to do.

II. MOTIVES which should induce thus to sit still. We have to consider that in certain cases to do otherwise would be utterly useless. In these cases it is a waste of power to make further effort, and a waste of feeling to allow anxiety to distress the heart. Thus any other course would be injurious, would destroy or disturb our peace of mind. And there are occasions when to be quiet is to trust in the providential rule and care of God. So it was with Ruth at this conjuncture. The example of Christ should not be overlooked. There came a time when he was silent before his foes.

III. The BLESSING which follows sitting still. 1. Peace of heart. "Rest in the Lord." 2. Strength. "Your strength is to sit still." "In quietness and confidence shall be your strength." 3. If God will, prosperity. "He shall give thee thy heart's desire." 4. In any case the glory of God, who desires that his people should do his will, and leave results to him.—T.

Ver. 1.—*Thoughtful love.* "Shall not I seek rest for thee?" How natural. We cannot ever be with those we love. Marriage is God's own ideal, and it is the happiest estate if his fear dwells in our hearts.

I. THERE IS NO EARTHLY REST LIKE THE REST OF HOME. Judges, warriors, statesmen enjoy the honours of life, and are conscious of pleasure in promotion and distinction, but their biographies tell us how they turn to home as the highest joy of all. Yes! Nothing can compensate for the loss of a happy home, and we should seek in every way to make it a refreshment and a delight by doing our best to promote its peace and purity.

II. THE EARTHLY HOME IS A PARABLE OF HEAVEN. Our Saviour touches our hearts at once when he says, "My Father's house," and when he speaks the exquisite parable of the prodigal son. No analogies of city or temple are so powerful in their influence over us as the analogy of home.—W. M. S.

Ver. 2.—*The work of winnowing.* "Behold, he winnoweth barley to-night." A world-old process this, the winnowing of the chaff from the wheat. Customs change,

and commercial life increases and creates ever new demands; but the agricultural life is still the basis of all. You may make new threshing-machines, but you must still have *bread*. It may be winnowed by steam or hand, but it must be *winnowed*. A pleasant Eastern sight: work done in the cool of the evening—"to-night."

I. WORK IS EVER ASSOCIATED BY GOD WITH HIS BLESSINGS TO MAN. We must plant and dig and reap. God sends the sunshine, the sweet air, and the shower. If a man will not work, neither shall he eat. A paradise of idlers would soon be a Gehenna indeed. No curse can come to a nation so sad as this: "Abundance of idleness was in her sons and her daughters."

II. WORK IS NEVER UNDIGNIFIED OR TO BE DISDAINED. A gentleman is gentle in his work—not because he does no work. It is a false pride that dislikes handiwork. Many of the diseases which darken the brain come from the unwise neglect of physical exercise. What is sweeter than the fragrance of the upturned soil? What is more beneficent than the law of labour, which calls forth the exercise of body, mind, and spirit?

III. WORK OF WINNOWING IS A DIVINE WORK ALSO. God uses his *tribulum* in our history, and the tribulation-work produces experience, patience, hope. When we are mourning over some sorrow or loss, it is the bruising flail of God's correction. And this comes at *all seasons* of life, even in the evening of the day. For we shall need chastisement even unto the end. What a doom is *that* "without chastisement."—W. M. S.

Ver. 11.—*Above rubies*. "A virtuous woman." Here is the crown of all beauty. What a renown is this of Ruth's. No jewelled necklet, no Eastern retinue, can give such attraction as this. We may have women of genius, and we admire genius; we may have women of scientific attainment, and God has given no lack of intellectual endowments to women, but we *must* have virtue. Let the history of later Rome tell us what the loss of this is.

I. NO LIFE IS HIDDEN. "All the city of my people doth know that thou art a virtuous woman." Every history stands revealed. Concerning Nehemiah, we read of the testimony given in time of national trouble: "There is a man in thy kingdom in whose heart is the fear of the holy God." And so this simple-hearted Ruth, who had not tried to make herself attractive to the young men, poor or rich, who had been modest in manner and heroic in conduct, left the impress of her character on the city.

II. NO LIFE CAN BE RELIGIOUS THAT IS NOT VIRTUOUS. We may, indeed, have virtue of a kind, a morality of respectability, without religion; but we cannot be religious without morality, for religion does not consist in ceremonies however impressive, or days however sacred, or opinions however sound; but in a life of consecration to God, and of obedience to all the sanctities of the moral law. There may be a religion of emotionalism merely; but blessed as it is to feel the true, we must live it out as well in common life.

III. NO POWER IS SO PERMANENT AS THAT OF HOLY LIFE. Character lives in others. We do not die when we pass from earth. Ruth lives to-day. It would be interesting to know how many have been led even in this age to devoutness and decision by the remembrance of her conduct and the exquisite pathos of her words. The little "city" of which our text speaks has passed away, but wherever the word of God is known and read, there Ruth reproduces herself in the history of others. The very name has become a family name, and is honoured by constant use in every generation.—W. M. S.

Ver. 12.—*Woman's influence*. In all history woman has held a place of regal influence. Not by intruding on the sphere of man, not by acting as if there were no Divine providence in the more delicate physical constitution of woman which incapacitates her for the strain of hardest toil; but in the ideal of "home," in which she is to be the "abiding" one, filling it with the charm of quiet influence and the sacredness of self-sacrificing love.

I. HERE IS A STRANGE CONJUNCTION OF TERMS. "Virtuous" comes from the Latin *vir*, which means a man. What then? Is a woman to be like a man? Does it mean a manly woman? In one sense it does. For "the man" is taken in the

Scripture as the type of humanity in its best estate. "Show thyself a man," says David to Solomon. It means all that is pure, and brave, and true, and good. Thus "abominable" means something *ab homo*, to be designated as "away from a man;" something altogether alien to his nature. A virtuous woman is a woman who has strength of resistance to evil, strength of devotion to God, strength of patience and endurance in the path of obedience.

II. HERE IS THE POWER OF INFLUENCE. "All the people of my city (or, at the gate) doth know that thou art a virtuous woman." Certainly. "They that be otherwise cannot be hid." What a lesson that is! Character tells everywhere. You may not note the current running, but place your boat upon it, and you soon *see* it. So it is with a good life—it bears others in its current. We are all known. Men and women are judged at their true worth even in this world, and even the wicked respect the upright and the just. It was said of Nehemiah to the king in a time of trouble, "There is a man in thy kingdom in whose heart is the fear of the holy God."

III. HERE IS THE SECRET OF NATIONAL GLORY. It was so in Rome when they could speak with pride of the Roman matron, and it has been so in every nation under heaven. A Divine judgment was needed to purify this nation after the days of Charles II. Had it not been a time of judgment, the nation, as Charles Kingsley says, would have perished. Let the young be taught modesty even in dress and demeanour. Let all that is "fast" be frowned upon and made unfashionable. The grace that Christ gives is humility with the fear of the Lord.—W. M. S.

## EXPOSITION.

### CHAPTER IV.

Ver. 1.—**And Boaz went up to the gate, and sat there.** He "went up," for the city stood, as it still stands, on a ridge (see on ch. i. 1; iii. 6). "And sat there," on one of the stones, or stone benches, that were set for the accommodation of the townsfolk. The gateway in the East often corresponded, as a place of meeting, to the forum, or the market-place, in the West. Boaz had reason to believe that his kinsman would be either passing out to his fields, or passing in from his threshing-floor, through the one gate of the city. And lo, the kinsman of whom Boaz had spoken was passing; and he said, **Ho, such a one! turn hither and sit here. And he turned and sat down.** Boaz called his kinsman by his name; but the writer does not name him, either because he could not, or because he would not. The phrase "such a one," or "so and so," is a purely idiomatic English equivalent for the purely idiomatic Hebrew phrase **כֵּן אֵלֶּיךָ**. A literal translation is impossible. The Latin *N. N.* corresponds.

Ver. 2.—**And he took ten men of the elderly inhabitants of the city, and he said, Sit ye here; and they sat down.** Boaz wished to have a full complement of witnesses to the important transaction which he contemplated.

Ver. 3.—**And he said to the kinsman, Naomi, who has returned from the land of Moab, has resolved to sell the portion of land which belonged to our brother Elimelech.** Boaz, it is evident, had talked over

with Ruth the entire details of Naomi's plans, and could thus speak authoritatively. Naomi, we must suppose, had previously taken Ruth into full confidence, so that Boaz could learn at second-hand what in other circumstances he would have learned from Naomi herself. The verb which we have rendered "has resolved to sell," is literally "has sold," and has been so rendered by many expositors, inclusive of Riegler and Wright. The Syriac translator gives the expression thus, "has sold to me." The subsequent context, however, makes it evident that the property had not been sold to any one, and consequently not to Boaz. The perfect verb is to be accounted for on the principle explained by Driver when he says, "The perfect is employed to indicate actions, the accomplishment of which lies indeed in the future, but is regarded as dependent upon such an unalterable determination of the will that it may be spoken of as having actually taken place: thus a resolution, promise, or decree, especially a Divine one, is very frequently announced in the perfect tense. A striking instance is afforded by Ruth (iv. 3) when Boaz, speaking of Naomi's determination to sell her land, says **מִכְרָהּ נָתַתִּי**, literally, 'has sold' (has resolved to sell. The English idiom would be 'is selling')." ("Treatise on the Use of the Tenses in Hebrew," pp. 13, 14). In King James's English version the verb is thus freely rendered "scelleth." Luther's version is equivalent—*beut feil*, "offers for sale;" or, as Coverdale renders it, "offereth to sell." Vatable freely renders it as we

have done, "has determined to sell" (*vendere decrevit*); so Drusus (*vendere instituit*). The kind family feeling of Boaz, shining out in the expression, "our brother Elimelech," is noteworthy. "Brother" was to him a homely and gracious term for "near kinsman."

Ver. 4.—**And I said (to myself).** There is little likelihood in the opinion of those who maintain, with Rosenmüller, that the expression, "I said," refers to a promise which Boaz had made to Ruth (see ch. iii. 13). It is a primitive phrase to denote internal resolution. There is a point where thought and speech coalesce. Our words are thoughts, and our thoughts are words. **I will uncover thine ear,** that is, "I will lift the locks of hair that may be covering the ear, so as to communicate something in confidence." But here the phrase is employed with the specific import of secrecy dropped out. It is thus somewhat equivalent to "I will give thee notice;" only the following expression **לֵאמֹר**, *i. e.* to say, must be read in the light of the undiluted original phrase, "I will uncover thine ear to say." The whole expression furnishes the most beautiful instance imaginable of the primary meaning of **לֵאמֹר**. The thing that was to be said follows immediately, *viz.* Acquire it, or Buy it. It is as if he had said, "Now you have a chance which may not occur again." It is added, **in the presence of the inhabitants.** This, rather than "the assessors," is the natural interpretation of the participle (**הַיֹּשְׁבִים**). It is the translation which the word generally receives in the very numerous instances in which it occurs. There was, so to speak, a fair representation of the inhabitants of the city in the casual company that had assembled in the gateway. **And in presence of the elders of my people.** The natural "aldermen," or unofficial "senators," whose presence extemporised for the occasion a sufficient court of testators. **If thou wilt perform the part of a kinsman, perform it.** The translation in King James's English version, and in many other versions, *viz.* "If thou wilt redeem it, redeem it," is somewhat out of harmony with the nature of the case. Naomi was not wishing Elimelech's estate to be redeemed. It was not yet in a position to be redeemed. It had not been alienated or sold. She wished for it not a redeemer, but a purchaser. **And as it was the right of a kinsman to redeem for a reduced brother,** if he was able and willing, the estate which had been sold to an alien (Levit. xxv. 25), so it was the privilege of the same **לֵאמֹר** or kinsman to get, if the reduced brother was wishing to sell, the first

offer of the estate. It would, in particular, be at variance with the prerogative of the nearest of kin if some other one in the circle of the kindred, but not so near, were to be offered on sale the usufructuary possession of the family estate (Levit. xxv. 23, 27). Hence Boaz recognised the prior prerogative of his anonymous relative and friend, and said to him, "If thou wilt perform the part of a kinsman, and buy the property, then buy it." It is added, **and if he will not.** Note the use of the third person *he*, instead of the second *thou*. If the reading be correct, then Boaz, in thus speaking, must for the moment have turned to the witnesses so as to address them. That the reading is correct, notwithstanding that some MSS. and all the ancient versions exhibit the verb in the second person, is rendered probable by the very fact that *it is the difficult reading*. There could be no temptation for a transcriber to substitute the third person for the second; there would be temptation to substitute the second for the third. The unanimity of the ancient versions is probably attributable to the habit of neglecting absolute literality, and translating according to the sense, when the sense was clear. Boaz, turning back instantaneously to his relative, says, **Make thou known to me, that I may know,** for there is none besides thee to act the kinsman's part (with the exception of myself), and I come after thee. The little clause, "with the exception of myself," lies in the sense, or spirit, although not in the letter of Boaz's address, as reported in the text. **And he said, I will act the kinsman's part.** He was glad to get the opportunity of adding to his own patrimonial possession the property that had belonged to Elimelech, and which Naomi, in her reduced condition, wished to dispose of. So far all seemed to go straight against the interests of Ruth.

Ver. 5.—**And Boaz said, In the day when thou acquirest the land from the hand of Naomi, and from Ruth the Moabitess, (in that day) thou hast acquired the wife of the deceased, to establish the name of the deceased upon his inheritance.** So we would punctuate and render this verse. Boaz distinctly informed his relative that if the land was acquired at all by a kinsman, it must be acquired with its living appurtenance, Ruth the Moabitess, so that, by the blessing of God, the Fountain of families, there might be the opportunity of retaining the possession of the property in the line of her deceased husband, that line coalescing in the line of her second husband. It was the pleasure of Naomi and Ruth, in offering their property for sale, to burden its acquisition, on the part of a kinsman, with the condition specified. If there should be fruit after the



marriage, the child would be heir of the property, just as if he had been Machlon's son, even though the father should have other and older sons by another wife.

Ver. 6. — And the kinsman said, I am not able to perform, for myself, the kinsman's part, lest I should destroy my inheritance. Perform thou, for thyself, the kinsman's part devolving on me, for I am not able to perform it. The moment that Ruth was referred to, as the inseparable appurtenance of Elimelech's estate, a total change came over the feelings of the anonymous relative and the spirit of his dream. He "could not," so he strongly put it, perform the kinsman's part. The probability is that he already had a family, but was a widower. This being the state of the case, it followed that if he should acquire Ruth along with her father-in-law's property, there might be an addition, perhaps a numerous addition, to his family; and if so, then there would be more to provide for during his lifetime, and at his death an increased subdivision of his patrimony. This, as he strongly put it, would be to "destroy" his patrimony, inasmuch as it might be frittered into insignificant fractions. There can be no reference, as the Chaldee Targumist imagined, to his fear of domestic dissensions. Or, if he did indeed think of such a casualty, he certainly did not give the idea expression to Boaz and the assessors. Cassel takes another view. "It must be," he says, "her Moabitish nationality that forms the ground, such as it is, of the kinsman's refusal. Elimelech's misfortunes had been popularly ascribed to his emigration to Moab; the death of Chilion and Machlon to their marriage with Moabitish women. This it was that had endangered their inheritance. The *goël* fears a similar fate. He thinks that he ought not to take into his house a woman, marriage with whom has already been visited with the extinguishment of a family in Israel." But if this had been what he referred to when he spoke of the "destruction" of his inheritance, it was not much in harmony with the benevolence which he owed to Boaz, and to which he so far gives expression in the courtesy of his address, that he should have gratuitously urged upon his relative what he declined as dangerous for himself. The expressions "for myself" and "for thyself" (אני and לך) are significant. The anonymous relative does not conceal the idea that it would be only on the ground of doing what would be *for his own interest* that he could entertain for consideration the proposal of Naomi. He likewise assumed that if Boaz should be willing to act the kinsman's part, it would be simply because it could be turned to account *for his own*

*interest*. He did not know that there was in Boaz's heart a love that truly "seeketh not her own," but in honour prefers the things of another.

Ver. 7. — And this was formerly a custom in Israel, on occasion of surrendering rights of kinship, or of selling and buying land, in order to confirm any matter; a man drew off his shoe and gave it to the other contracting party. This was attestation in Israel. We give a free translation. The custom was significant enough. He who sold land, or surrendered his right to act as a kinsman in buying land, intimidated by the symbolical act of taking off his shoe, and handing it to his friend, that he freely gave up his right to walk upon the soil, in favour of the person who had acquired the possession. Corresponding symbolical acts, in connection with the transfer of lands, have been common, and probably still are, in many countries. No doubt the shoe, after being received, would be immediately returned.

Ver. 8. — And the kinsman said to Boaz, Acquire for thyself; and drew off his shoe. On the instant that he said, "Acquire for thyself," viz., the land with its living appurtenant, he drew off his shoe and presented it. Josephus allowed his imagination to run off with his memory when, mixing up the historical case before us with the details of the ancient Levirate law (Deut. xxv. 7—9), which were, in later times at all events, more honoured in the breach than in the observance, he represents Boaz as "bidding the woman loose the man's shoe and spit in his face." The actual ceremony was not an insult, but a graphic and inoffensive attestation. Yet it gradually wore out and was superseded. No vestige of it remained in the days of the writer, and the Chaldee Targumist seems to have been scarcely able to realise that such a custom could ever have existed. He represents the anonymous kinsman as drawing off his "right-hand glove" and handing it to Boaz. But take note of the German word for "glove," viz., *Handschuh* (a hand-shoe).

Ver. 9. — And Boaz said to the elders and all the people, Ye are witnesses this day that I have acquired the whole estate of Elimelech, and the whole estate of Chilion and Machlon, from the hand of Naomi. It is absolutely necessary that, at this part of the narrative, as well as in several other portions, we read "between the verses." Naomi, either personally or by representative, must have appeared on the scene, to surrender her territorial rights and receive the value of the estate that had belonged to her husband. But the writer merges in his account these coincidents, and hastens on to the consummation of his story. In the twofold expres-

sion, "the whole estate of Elimelech, and the whole estate of Chilion and Machlon," there is a kind of legal particularity. There was of course but one estate, but there was a succession in the proprietorship.

Ver. 10.—And likewise Ruth the Moabitess, wife of Machlon, have I acquired to myself to wife, to establish the name of the deceased upon his inheritance, so that the name of the deceased may not be cut off from among his brethren, and from the gate of his place: ye are witnesses this day. This, to Boaz, would be by far the most delightful part of the day's proceedings. His heart would swell with manly pride and devout gratitude when he realised, amid all the cumbrous technicalities of old Hebrew law, that Ruth was his. And he would rejoice all the more, as, in virtue of her connection with Machlon and Elimelech, both of their names would still be encircled with honour, and might, by the blessing of Yahveh, be linked on distinguishingly and lovingly to future generations. Note the expression, "that the name of the deceased may not be cut off from among his brethren, and from the gate of his place." The people who assembled at the gate might on some future day be able to say, "This boy is the heir of Machlon and Elimelech, who once migrated to Moab."

Ver. 11.—And all the people who were in the gateway, and the elders, said, Witnesses! May Yahveh grant that the wife who has come into thy house may be as Rachel and Leah, who built, the two of them, the house of Israel! The people of the city in general, and the venerable elders in particular, were pleased with every step that Boaz had taken. They felt that he had acted a truly honourable part, at once in reference to Naomi, and to Ruth, and to the nearest kinsman, and likewise in reference to themselves as the representatives of the general population. Blessings rose up within their hearts, ascended into heaven, and came down—charged with something Divine as well as something human and humane—in showers upon his head, and upon the head of his bride. When they prayed that the woman who was the choice of their fellow-citizen's heart should be as Rachel and Leah, they simply gave expression to the intensest desire that Israelites could cherish in reference to an esteemed sister. When they spoke of Rachel and Leah—the mothers of Israel—as "building up the house of Israel," they first of all compared the people to a household, and then they passed over from the idea of a household to the idea of a house as containing the household. They added, more particularly in reference to Boaz himself, *Do thou manfully in Ephratah*. The expression is somewhat

peculiar, ringing changes on the peculiar and remarkable term that occurs both in ch. ii. 1 and in ch. iii. 11. The expression is *עֲשֵׂה-חֵיל*. The people meant, "Act thou the part of a strong, substantial, worthy man." They added, in a kind of enthusiastic exclamation, *Proclaim thy name in Bethlehem*. They had, however, no reference to any verbal proclamation, or tribute of self-applause. The spirit of idealism had seized them. They meant, "Act the noble part—the part that will without voice proclaim in Bethlehem its own intrinsic nobleness."

Ver. 12.—And may thy house be as the house of Pharez, whom Tamar bare to Judah, (springing) from the seed which Yahveh will give to thee of this young woman! Pharez's descendants, the Pharezites, were particularly numerous, and hence the good wishes of Boaz's fellow-townsmen (see Num. xxvi. 20, 21).

Ver. 13.—And Boaz took Ruth, and she became to him his wife; and he went in to her, and Yahveh gave her conception, and she bore a son.

Ver. 14.—And the women said to Naomi, Blessed be Yahveh, who has given thee a kinsman this day! May his name become famous in Israel. Of course it is Ruth's son who is the kinsman referred to, the nearest kinsman, still nearer than Boaz. The kinsman was given, said the women, "this day," the day when the child was born. The expression which we have rendered, "who has given thee a kinsman," is, literally, "who has not caused to fail to thee a kinsman." The sympathetic women who had gathered together in Boaz's house were sanguine, or at least enthusiastically desirous, that a son so auspiciously given, after most peculiar antecedents, would yet become a famous name in Israel. Canon Cook supposes that the kinsman referred to by the women was not the child, but his father, Boaz ('Speaker's Commentary, *in loc.*'). Yet it is obvious that the kinsman specified was the one who, as they said, had been given, or had not been caused to fail, "that day." He was, moreover, the one of whom they went on to say, "May his name become famous in Israel, and may he be to thee a restorer of life, and for the support of thine old age," &c. Dr. Cook's objections are founded on a too narrow view of the functions devolving on, and of the privileges accruing to, a *goël*.

Ver. 15.—And may he be to thee a restorer of life, and for the support of thine old age: for thy daughter-in-law, who loved thee, hath borne him, and she is better to thee than seven sons. The number seven suggested an idea of fulness, com-

pleteness, perfection. The whole inhabitants of the city knew that Ruth's love to her mother-in-law had been indeed transcendent, and also that it had been transcendently returned.

Ver. 16.—And Naomi took the boy, and placed him in her bosom, and she became his foster-mother. She became his nurse in chief.

Ver. 17.—And the women, her neighbours, named the child, saying, A son has been born to Naomi; and they called his name Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David. "Obed," if a participle of the Hebrew verb *עָבַד*, naturally means *serving* or *servant*. No other derivation, apparently, can at present be assumed (but see Raabe's 'Glossar'). Josephus gives the participial interpretation as a matter of course, and Jerome too. If the objective correlate of the servitude referred to were Yahveh, then the word might be equivalent to *worshipper*. If the name, however, as seems to be the case, was imposed first of all by the matronly neighbours who had come to mingle their joys with those of the mother, and of the grandmother in particular, then it is not likely that there would be an overshadowing reference, either on the one hand to servitude in relation to Yahveh, or on the other to servitude in the abstract. Something simpler would be in harmony with their unsophisticated, impressible, and purely maternal minds. It is not at all unlikely that, in fondling the welcome "New-come," and congratulating the overjoyed grandmother, they would, with Oriental luxuriance of speech and Oriental overflow of demonstrativeness, speak of the 'lad' as come home to be a faithful *little servant* to his most excellent grandmother. The infirmities of advancing age, aggravated by anxieties many, griefs many, bereavements many, toils many, privations many, disappointments many, had been one after another accumulating on "the dear old lady." But now a sealed fountain of reviving waters had been opened in the wilderness. Might it for many years overflow! Might the oasis around it widen and still widen, till the whole solitary place should be blossoming as the rose! Might the lively little child be spared to minister, with bright activity and devotedness, to the aged pilgrim for the little remainder of her journey! The word which the sympathetic neighbours, with not the least intention to propose a real name, had been affectionately bandying

about, while fondling the child, was accepted by Boaz and Ruth. They would say to one another, "Yes, just let him be little *Obed* to his loving grandmother." Naomi, soothed in all her motherly and grandmotherly longings and aspirations, would seem to have yielded, resolving, we may suppose, to train the child up to be a *servant of Yahveh*.

Vers. 18—22.—And these are the lineal descendants of Pharez. Pharez begat Hezron, and Hezron begat Ram, and Ram begat Amminadab, and Amminadab begat Nahshon, and Nahshon begat Salmon, and Salmon begat Boaz, and Boaz begat Obed, and Obed begat Jesse, and Jesse begat David. This is the genealogy of King David, and it is therefore an integral part of the genealogy of King David's great descendant, his "Lord" and ours. As such it is incorporated entire in the two tables that are contained respectively in the first chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew, and the third of the Gospel according to Luke. Some of the names are somewhat Grecised and otherwise modified in those New Testament tables. Instead of Hezron we have Esrom; instead of Ram we have Aram; instead of Nahshon we have Naason; instead of Boaz we have Boos; in 1 Chron. ii. 11 we have Salma instead of Salmon. It has been keenly debated by chronologists and genealogists whether we should regard the list of David's lineal ancestors, given here and in 1 Chron. ii. 10—12, as also in Matt. i. 3—5, and Luke iii. 31—33, as complete. It is a thorny question to handle, and one not ready to be finally settled till the whole Old Testament chronology be adjusted. It is certain that in the larger tables of our Lord's genealogy there was, apparently for mnemonic purposes (Matt. i. 17), the mergence of certain inconspicuous links (see Matt. i. 8); and it would not need to be matter of wonder or concern if in that section of these tables which contains the genealogy of King David there should be a similar lifting up into the light, on the one hand, of the more prominent ancestors, and a shading off into the dark, on the other, of some who were less conspicuous. It lies on the surface of the genealogy that the loving-kindness and tender mercies of Yahveh stretch far beyond the confines of the Hebrews, highly favoured though that people was. "Is he," asks St. Paul, "the God of the Jews only? Is he not also of the Gentiles? Yes," the same apostle answers, "of the Gentiles also" (Rom. iii. 29).

## HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—12.—*The bridal of Boaz and Ruth.* I. THERE WERE SOME OBSTACLES IN THE WAY. There were none, indeed, in Boaz's heart; it was full of pure esteem and love for Ruth. There were none in his financial circumstances; he was able to provide amply for her comfort, and for all his own necessities and conveniences. There were none in his physical condition; he had been temperate in all things, and was in the enjoyment of health and strength. Neither were there any obstacles in Ruth's heart. It had already sought for refuge under the wings of Boaz's protection and sympathy. Nor were there any in her physical, intellectual, or moral condition. She was exceptionally "capable" in every respect, and eminently virtuous and good. She was filled, and had for long been filled, with the love "that seeketh not her own things." Although reduced in circumstances, she really belonged to the very class in society in which Boaz himself was moving. Nor were there obstacles on the part of Boaz's friends on the one hand, nor on the part of Ruth's one precious friend on the other. The obstacles were technical, arising out of the legal prerogative of a third party. Boaz set himself, in full concert with Ruth and Ruth's mother-in-law, to deal with these obstacles.

II. HE DID NOT LOITER OVER THE MATTER, or protract the proceedings unfeelingly from day to day, week to week, month to month, and even year to year, until "hope deferred" ate out every atom of enthusiasm from his own spirit, and made the heart of Ruth grow "sick." He took steps, without a single day's delay, to get his prospects and the prospects of Ruth righteously settled (see vers. 1—4).

III. YES, "RIGHTEOUSLY SETTLED." For it was not so much the simple settlement as the righteousness of it that he longed for. He would not gratify his desire to obtain Ruth—greatly as he esteemed, prized, and desired her—if he could not get her righteously and honourably. Hence the forensic scene in the gateway of the city.

IV. IT IS AN OLD-WORLD PICTURE that is drawn in the narrative, unveiling to view the grave, solemn manners of primitive but well-mannered times. The city had but one gate, through which, therefore, every one who went out or came in must needs pass. It would hence become the principal place of concourse for the townsfolk. It was the place of primitive marketing and bartering. It was the place of primitive judicature. It was, as it were, the senate-hall or parliament-house of the town. The elders and fathers "did congregate" there, in the presence of the casual public, to discuss the incidents that were transpiring, or the topics that were interesting the public mind. It was the place of morning and evening lounge. Boaz was careful to be early in the morning at this gateway, and immediately on arrival he took steps to secure a judicial settlement, if needed, and, at all events, a complete attestation of the facts of any nuptial arrangement that might be made. The people would begin to assemble leisurely. They would salute one another courteously. Every one would be of staid demeanour. There would be no rush, or push, or panting haste. The true Oriental likes to be self-possessed and leisurely. Some would be passing out, some passing in; but all would be ready to pause and hail one another respectfully. Kindly salutations would be directed to Boaz, and returned. It would be manifest from his countenance, from the tones of his voice, from his entire demeanour and manner, that he *meant business* that morning. See him as he moved about stable, yet elastic, and wound up. He invites certain venerated fathers to be seated on the stone benches set in a row at the base of the city wall, as he had an affair to transact which he wished them by their presence to attest. Other citizens, meanwhile, one by one, would be arriving on the scene, some of them younger men and some older. They are grouped about. They feel that something unusual is in the air. At length there is a full conclave, and Boaz opens his case with his kinsman. It was this:—Naomi, who had so recently returned from the land of Moab, was now unfortunately in such reduced circumstances that she had resolved to sell the property which had belonged to her deceased husband. Now then was the opportunity of the nearest kinsman. In virtue of being the nearest in kinship, he was entitled to the first offer of the property. "Buy it, therefore," said Boaz, "before the inhabitants, and before the elders of my people. If thou wilt act the part of the nearest kins-

man (as thou art entitled to do), then act it, and buy the property" (ver. 4). The kinsman seemed glad that he should have such an opportunity of adding to his patrimonial estate, and accordingly, in presence of the elders and other inhabitants, he heartily said, "I will act the kinsman's part." As he thus spoke there would, in all likelihood, be murmurs of applause round and round. Who could object to the kinsman getting the estate if he should offer to pay a liberal price to the reduced widow? It was, in its own little sphere of things, quite a crisis. Deep-drawing interests, affections, and desires were trembling in the balance. Boaz looked grave. But it was evident to perceptive eyes that he had not yet unfolded the whole case to view. After the briefest possible pause he resumed, and said, in the presence of the judicial conclave, "In the day when thou buyest the land from Naomi, thou must buy it not from her only, but from Ruth also, as prospective heiress; and more, thou must buy it *with Ruth at present upon it, as its inalienable appurtenant*, in order that the name of her deceased husband may, by the blessing of the God of Israel, descend with it in the line of her posterity (ver. 5). It was only for a moment that the fate of the gentle Moabitess trembled in its scale. The kinsman was not prepared to accept the property on Naomi's terms. He feared that new interests would spring up to fritter into insignificant patches the property which he already possessed. Hence he said to Boaz, in the presence of the elders and the other citizens, "I cannot act the part of the nearest kinsman; do thou it, Boaz, in my room" (ver. 6). Boaz would triumph in his heart; and so, when she became informed of the decision, would Naomi; and so would Ruth. But some legal formalities required to be observed ere the renunciation of the prerogative attaching to the nearest kinsman became absolutely binding in law. "This," says the writer, "was formerly a custom in Israel on occasion of surrendering rights of kinship, or selling and buying land, in order to confirm every matter. A man drew off his shoe and gave it to the contracting party. This was attestation in Israel" (ver. 7). Accordingly, the nearest kinsman in the case before us drew off his shoe and tendered it to Boaz, in testimony that he therewith resigned all right to walk upon the ground in question (ver. 8). After this formality had been completed, and Boaz had courteously, in presence of the assembled witnesses, returned the symbolic shoe, he seems to have sent for Naomi and Ruth, and to have finished with them, in the presence of the people, the arrangement which was the most momentous into which he had ever entered, and which promised to be big with blessing to others as well as to himself. It was not only a marriage settlement; it was a bridal ceremony. The antique benisons of the elders and the other citizens fell round him thick and fast (vers. 9—12), and that blessing which maketh rich, and to which no sorrow is added, the blessing of the God of families and of all family love, descended and crowned the union.

V. It is infinitely becoming that all things in marriage should be done "DECENTLY," "IN ORDER," and ABOVE-BOARD. Let everything clandestine be sensitively avoided. Whenever there is anything in marriage or its preliminaries that needs smothering up, the wind is sown, and the whirlwind will need to be reaped.

VI. If stable HAPPINESS AFTER MARRIAGE be desired, care should be taken to have all preliminaries duly, clearly, and righteously pre-arranged, more particularly such as have reference to possessions, money, rights, or prerogatives. There should be also, especially in these modern times, distinct preliminary arrangements regarding the chief manners and customs of the home, and the relationship that is to be sustained to Churches, and Church assemblies and ordinances. Much indeed must be left to future and incidental adjustment; but great regulative principles should be mutually settled.

VII. If, in "the estate of marriage," there be, as there should be and might be, on both sides a continual aim after whatsoever things are true, honest, seemly, honourable, just, pure, lovely, virtuous, and praiseworthy, then the light of life will shine in the home and in the heart with inexpressible sweetness and brightness. But if there be suspicion, jealousy, hard authority, tyranny, a dictatorial spirit, or any grossness, or secret faithlessness, or the neglect of courtesy, or the extinguishment of kindness and daily benevolence, if there be hard selfishness, however glitteringly glozed over with a semblance of good manners, then the light of life will be not only partially, but totally eclipsed. When the selfishness unmask itself to the full, the last feeble

flame, flickering in the socket, will die out, and be succeeded by a darkness that is the very "blackness of darkness." The true ideal of conjugal relationship is presented by St. Paul in his Epistle to the Ephesians (ch. v. 25-33). The husband's love should be as the love of Jesus to his Church. The love of the wife should be as the love of the Church to Jesus. Then the marriage is "in the Lord;" and, what is better still, the life after the marriage is life "in the Lord," and life *to the Lord*. It was from ages and generations "a great mystery," but now it is made manifest in every Christian home that is Christian indeed.

Vers. 13-22.—*Little Obed*. A birth, and in particular a first birth, in the homes of the "excellent of the earth" is always an interesting and exciting event. What multitudes of beginnings there are in childhood! What multitudes of buds and beautiful rose-buddings! What possibilities and uncertainties! What wonderful littlenesses of hands and feet, and other organs, all so marvellously harmonised and complete! What wondrous and wondering eyes, looking, and still looking, as if they would really read your very heart! What winsome smiles and early recognitions!

I. **LITTLE OBED WAS A FORTUNATE CHILD.** He had three great privileges. He had a good father, a good mother, and a good grandmother. What a blessing! His father was one of the most upright, most honourable, most gracious of men. His mother was "one among a thousand." She had a large heart, full of singular affection and self-denying devotedness. His grandmother was a woman with bold outline of character, but with a capability of yearning and attachment unfathomably deep.

II. If little Obed grew up, as is likely, **IN THE FEAR AND FAVOUR OF GOD**, then what was long afterwards said of Timothy might by some one be said of him, "I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt at first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice, and I am persuaded in thee also" (2 Tim. i. 5).

III. **FROM HIS VERY BIRTH HE WOULD BE CRADLED IN LOVE**, the threefold love of Ruth, Boaz, and Naomi, intertwined into a delightful unity of affection.

IV. **GREAT WOULD BE THE REJOICINGS OVER HIS ADVENT.** 1. Ruth would think of Machlon, and rejoice. 2. Naomi would think of Elimelech, and rejoice. 3. Boaz would think of both the deceased, and rejoice that their names were not to be cut off from among their brethren. Then again (1) Ruth would rejoice for her husband's sake, whose home would be brighter now than ever. And she would have peculiar joy for Naomi's sake, whose fondest wishes and hopes and plans had been so happily consummated. (2) Boaz would rejoice over the joy and consolation of Ruth and Naomi; and he would drink from another fountain of joy as he realised that he himself, instead of being the terminal link in the genealogical chain, might now have a place in the line of future generations. (3) Naomi would rejoice because her deepest desires had been brought up into the light, and crowned with the blessing of the Almighty. No longer was He the embitterer of her lot (ch. i. 20). Her name was true, and not to be exchanged for Mara. She was herself again "Naomi," for "sweet is Jah." His character is "sweet," his thoughts, his feelings, his plans, his ways, all are "sweet."

V. In another respect would there be peculiar rejoicings over Obed's advent. He **WAS THE MUCH LONGED-FOR HEIR OF TWO DISTINCT ESTATES**. Let us hope that he would be trained up to think of the responsibilities as well as of the privileges that would come to him in virtue of being born into a good position in society.

VI. **HIS NAME WOULD BE BEAUTIFULLY SIGNIFICANT TO HIM IN PROPORTION AS HIS MIND UNFOLDED AND EXPANDED.** He would have various ministries to fulfil. A ministry to his grandmother. A ministry to his mother. A ministry to his father. A ministry to his dependents. A ministry to his friends and neighbours, and countrymen in general. Above all, he would have a ministry to the God of his fathers and of their children's children. It would be his business to be OBED in all relations. Even Jesus, out of all compare the greatest of his descendants, became OBED, and took upon himself "the form of a SERVANT," and took far more than the form; he came "not to be ministered unto, but to minister."

VII. It was the hope of the congratulatory matrons who fondled the welcome child, that he would be to his grandmother "a restorer of life" and "a nourisher of her old age" (ver. 15). High is the privilege of children and grand-children

thus to brighten to the aged the evening of life, when the long shadows are stretching far away. Happy they who count this a privilege!

VIII. What a charm is thrown over infant life by the action of Obed's great descendant in reference to children. He said, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven." He took them up in his arms, laid his hand upon their heads, and blessed them (Matt. xix. 14; Mark x. 14—16). At another time he called a little child to him and set him in the midst of his ambitious disciples, and said, "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. xviii. 2, 3). In this love for little children Jesus, as in so many other respects, was "the image of the invisible God." He shows us exactly what is the heart, and what are the heart affections, of God. *Such as was the visible Jesus in feelings and character such is the invisible God.* He, therefore, he, even he, is a lover of little children, without distinction or exception.

### HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1, 2.—*A primitive council.* The writer of this book depicts for us in this passage a very picturesque scene. We observe—1. *The place of judgment and public business.* "Judges and officers shalt thou make thee in all thy gates . . . throughout thy tribes, and they shall judge the people with just judgment." The parents of the disobedient son were to "bring him out unto the elders of his city, and unto the gate of his place." Absalom, when plotting against his father's authority, "stood beside the way of the gate," and intercepted those that came to the king, for judgment. 2. The court in whose presence important business was transacted—"the elders of the city." Such elders were prescribed, as is evident from several passages in Deuteronomy; and the early books of the Old Testament contain frequent references to them and to their duties. Allusion is made to the elders of Succoth, of Jezreel, and of this same Bethlehem in the time of Samuel. Ten seems to have been what we should call a quorum. There is wisdom, gravity, deliberation, dignity, in the proceedings here recorded.

I. HUMAN SOCIETY REQUIRES INSTITUTIONS OF LAW AND JUSTICE. The relations between man and man must not be determined by chance, or left to the decision of force or fraud. "Order is Heaven's first law."

II. LAW AND JUSTICE SHOULD BE SANCTIONED BY RELIGION. Religion cannot approve of all actions done by all in authority; but it acknowledges and respects government as a Divine institution, and awakens conscience to support justice.

III. THERE ARE CERTAIN CONDITIONS IN CONFORMITY WITH WHICH PUBLIC BUSINESS SHOULD BE TRANSACTED. 1. Openness and publicity. 2. Solemn and formal ratification and record of important acts. 3. Equality of citizens before the law. 4. As much liberty as is compatible with public rights. 5. Integrity and incorruptness on the part of those who administer the law.—T.

Vers. 3—8.—*The goël.* Every nation has its own domestic and social usages. Among those prevalent in Israel was the relationship of the *goël*. He was the redeemer, or the next kinsman of one deceased, whose duty it was to purchase an inheritance in danger of lapsing, or to redeem one lapsed. The duties were defined in the Levitical law. According to the custom and regulation known as Levirate, he was expected to marry the widow of the deceased, and to raise up seed unto the dead, in case no issue were left of the marriage dissolved by death. From this Book of Ruth it is clear that the two duties, that with regard to property and that respecting marriage, centered in the same person. Failing the unnamed kinsman, it fell to the lot of Boaz to act the part of the near relative of Ruth's deceased husband. Usages and laws differ, but the fact of kindred remains, and involves many duties.

I. HUMAN KINDRED IS A DIVINE APPOINTMENT.

II. AND IS BOTH SUGGESTIVE AND ILLUSTRATIVE OF RELIGIOUS, OF CHRISTIAN TRUTH. *E.g.* of the fatherhood of God; of the brotherhood of man; based upon that of Christ.

III. KINDRED IS AT THE FOUNDATION OF HUMAN LIFE, AS SOCIAL AND POLITICAL.

IV. KINDRED INVOLVES CONSIDERATION AND REGARD.

V. AND, WHERE CIRCUMSTANCES RENDER IT EXPEDIENT, PRACTICAL HELP.

Appeal:—Do we recognise the just claims of kindred? If we do not, is not our failure traceable to an imperfect apprehension of spiritual relationships?—T.

Vers. 4, 6.—*Our own inheritance.* "Lest I mar mine own inheritance." How many do this? They have noble inheritances, but in a multitude of ways they mar them.

I. THERE IS THE INHERITANCE OF PHYSICAL HEALTH. Most precious; not to be gotten for fine gold. Yet how often it is injured by sloth and sin, by intemperance and lust, or by the overtaxed brain, and neglect of the simple economy of health.

II. THERE IS THE INHERITANCE OF A GOOD NAME. This too is a priceless gift. More to be desired than gold, yea, than fine gold. Character. It takes years to win—whether for a commercial house or for a personal reputation; but it takes only a moment to lose. How many a son has marred his inheritance! The "good name" is irrecoverable in the highest sense. Forgiveness may ensue, but the memory of evil lives after.

III. THERE IS THE INHERITANCE OF A RELIGIOUS FAITH. "My father's God." Then my father *had* a God! There had been a generation to serve him before I was born! Am I to be the first to break the glorious chain, to sever the great procession? "One generation shall praise thy works to another." How beautiful! Is *my* voice to be silent, my thought to be idle, my heart to be cold and dead to God my Saviour? Let me think of the unfeigned faith of my grandmother Lois and my mother Eunice, and not mar the inheritance through unbelief.—W. M. S.

Vers. 9—11.—*Honourable conduct honourably witnessed.* By the "shoe" in the context is meant, no doubt, the sandal, which in the East was, and is, the ordinary covering of the foot, fastened by means of a thong of leather. Although in a house, or in a temple, the sandal was dispensed with, it was always used in walking and upon a journey. It was taken off at meals, in every sacred place, and in the presence of every sacred person, and on occasion of mourning. The context brings before us a symbolical use of the sandal. In early times—for even when this book was written the custom was obsolete—it was the usage of the men of Israel, in taking possession of any landed property, to pluck off the shoe. This was the survival of a still older custom—the planting the foot upon the newly-acquired soil, outwardly and visibly to express the taking possession of it, and asserting a right to it as one's own. Having, by the permission and at the suggestion of the unnamed kinsman, performed this simple symbolical act, Boaz proceeded to address the assembled elders of the city, calling them to witness two facts: his purchase of the field of Elimelech, and his resolve to take Ruth, the widow of Elimelech's son, as his own wife. The elders, in presence of one another, formally and solemnly declared, We are witnesses.

I. A RELIGIOUS MAN SHOULD BE SCRUPULOUSLY HONOURABLE IN THE TRANSACTIONS OF LIFE.

II. IN NOTHING IS THIS RULE MORE IMPORTANT THAN IN QUESTIONS AFFECTING PROPERTY AND IN MARRIAGE.

III. PUBLICITY, THE PRESENCE OF COMPETENT AND VERACIOUS, HONOURABLE WITNESSES, MAY BE REGARDED AS OF THE HIGHEST IMPORTANCE. Secret marriages and underhand proceedings with regard to property are to be avoided.

IV. A PUBLIC PROFESSION OF CHRISTIANITY IN THE PRESENCE OF WITNESSES IS WISE, RIGHT, AND EXPEDIENT.—T.

Ver. 10.—*The name of the dead.* Elimelech was dead, Mahlon was dead. But to Naomi and to Ruth, who survived, and even to Boaz, the kinsmen of the deceased, the dead were sacred. Not only was their memory treasured in the hearts of the survivors; the fact that they had lived exercised an influence, and a very marked influence, over the conduct of those still living. This was human, admirable, and right.

I. THE NAME OF THE DEAD SHOULD BE SACRED IN EVERY FAMILY. We were theirs, and they are still ours—ours whilst we live. To forget them would be brutish and



inhuman. Their memory should be cherished. Their wishes, within reasonable limits, should be fulfilled. Their example, if good, should be reverently studied and diligently copied.

II. THE NAME OF THE DEAD IS A NATIONAL POSSESSION AND POWER. "One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh." But each generation inherits from its predecessor. Patriotism is fostered by the traditions of the great men who have gone, and whose memory is the national pride and glory. To us in England what inspiration does "the name of the dead" afford! The heroes, statesmen, patriots, saints, discoverers, &c. have left behind them imperishable names. "Let us now," says the apocryphal writer, "let us now praise famous men and our fathers which begat us."

III. THE NAME OF THE DEAD IS THE INSPIRATION OF THE WORLD'S LABOURS AND HOPES. All great names, save One, are names of the dead, or of those who soon will be such. One was dead, but lives again, and for evermore. His undying life gives true life and power to the great names of those whom he causes to live again; for he teaches us that nothing he has sanctified can ever die.

Query:—What shall our name be when we are with the dead?—T.

Vers. 11, 12.—*Good wishes.* When the marriage of Boaz with Ruth was resolved upon, the elders of the city, the bridegroom's neighbours and friends, expressed with cordiality their congratulations and good wishes. They wished well to himself, to his wife, to his house or family, to his offspring, his seed.

I. KIND WISHES ARE FOUNDED IN A PRINCIPLE DIVINELY PLANTED IN HUMAN NATURE. Sympathy is a principle of human nature. Benevolence is as natural as selfishness, though less powerful over most minds. And we should "rejoice with those who do rejoice."

II. IT IS RIGHT THAT KIND WISHES SHOULD BE EXPRESSED IN WORDS. There is no doubt danger lest insincerity should creep into the customary salutations and benedictions of life; many compliments are utterly insincere. Yet even the most scrupulous and veracious may legitimately utter good wishes. It is churlish to withhold such utterances.

III. CHRISTIANITY GIVES A RICH, FULL MEANING TO THE KIND WISHES OF FRIENDSHIP. For our religion teaches us to turn every wish into a prayer. It is a sufficient condemnation of a wish that it cannot take this form. With Christians, "God bless you!" should be a hearty and fervent intercession.—T.

Ver. 13.—*The birth of a son.* With true piety as well as justice the author of this book refers the blessings of domestic life to him who setteth his people in families, and of whom it is said, "Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord, and the fruit of the womb is his reward." Whenever a child is born into the world the Spirit of wisdom teaches us, as Christians, lessons of the most practical and valuable kind.

I. GRATITUDE TO GOD FOR A PRECIOUS GIFT. Christian parents feel that they receive no gifts so valuable, so dear as the children bestowed upon them by the goodness of God. Thanks are ever due for the Divine favour thus shown.

II. A SENSE OF PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITY. He must be stolid and insensible indeed who, when his firstborn is placed in his arms, has no thought of the sacred charge laid upon him. Gifts are trusts. The parent's desire and prayer should be for grace to fulfil solemn responsibilities.

III. RESOLUTIONS REGARDING EDUCATION. Remembering that for the first years of life a child is almost entirely under the parents' influence, fathers and mothers will not only at the first seriously and prayerfully dedicate their offspring to God, but will consider how they may train them up in the way they should go, that when they are old they may not depart from it.

IV. A SPIRIT OF DEPENDENCE UPON "THE FATHER OF THE SPIRITS OF ALL FLESH" FOR A BLESSING. We cannot too much connect our children with the throne of grace. Private and family prayer will be the means of domestic happiness, and will assist parents in exercising a watchful care and faithful guidance, and children in using aright the opportunities of improvement with which they are favoured.—T.

Ver. 18.—*The birth-hour.* "And she bare a son." Memorable day that! Read to the end of the chapter: "There was a son born to Naomi; and they called his name Obed: he is the father of Jesse, the father of DAVID." The old divines used to consider that Ruth the Moabitess becoming an ancestor of David was a prefiguration of the admission of the Gentiles into the Christian Church. Certain it is that the Jews did think this a dishonour to David, and Shimei in his revilings is supposed to taunt David with his descent from Ruth. But the descent of the same true spirit is the real descent of honour.

I. THE CHILD'S NAME. Obed, a servant. It may be a remembrancer of duty. Just as the motto of the Prince of Wales is—"Ich dien," I serve. Any way it is beautiful never to despise *service*. A Christian is to be "meet for the Master's use." How many there are who are of no *use* in the world! Some dislike all service, and prefer the dainty hand that is never soiled, and the life that is never separated from selfishness.

II. THE BENEDICTION ON NAOMI. Naomi was there to receive congratulations. What a time for the mother in Israel to be with the new mother! There is sacred anxiety in such hours in the household. Why should the name of mother-in-law be the butt for satire? Many can testify how precious her care and kindness is in such a season. It is easy, but wicked as easy, to satirise a relationship which, if it creates responsibilities, confers also kindness which cannot be bought.

III. THE PROPHECY CONCERNING THE BADE. How soon infancy merges into youth and manhood. In a few years Naomi will be bent and bowed. The white winter of age is coming, and then this child shall be a nourisher of Naomi's old age. A desolate time indeed for those who have no children's children to brighten their declining days, and, if needful, to succour them when friend and helper are gone. But all here is traced, as in Hebrew history all is ever traced, to the good hand of God. "Blessed be the Lord, which hath not left thee this day without a kinsman."—W. M. S.

Vers. 14—17.—*The benevolent happiness of old age.* The story of Ruth closes amidst domestic prosperity and happiness, and amidst neighbourly congratulations. And it is observable that Naomi, whose trials and sorrows interest us so deeply at the commencement of this book, appears at its close radiant with renewed happiness: her daughter-in-law a mother, she herself a grand-parent, surrounded by rejoicing neighbours, expressing their congratulations, and invoking blessing upon her and those dear to her. The narrative loses sight of Ruth in picturing the felicity of her mother-in-law. The neighbours who before had asked, "Is this Naomi?" now exclaim, "There is a son born to Naomi: blessed be the Lord, which hath not left thee this day without a kinsman." She is encompassed with the blessings which, in the language of our poet, "should accompany old age"—"honour, love, obedience, troops of friends."

I. UNSELFISHNESS IS REWARDED. Naomi had all along thought more of Ruth's sorrows and of Ruth's happiness than of her own. And now this very Ruth is made the means of her prosperity, comfort, and joy in declining years.

II. HOPES ARE FULFILLED. It was Naomi's desire that Ruth might attain to "rest," and her counsels had been directed to this end. Now she sees the Moabitess a happy wife, a happy mother.

III. A JOYOUS PROSPECT IS OPENED UP. The day has been cloudy and stormy, but how brightly does the sun shine out at eventide! "A restorer of her life," "a nourisher of her old age," is given her. The child Obed becomes her delight, and her imaginations picture his manhood, and his position in an honourable line of descent.

IV. SYMPATHY ENHANCES HAPPINESS. There is mutual reaction here; Ruth, Naomi, and the neighbours, with unselfish congratulations, rejoicings, and prayers, contribute to one another's welfare.—T.

Vers. 18—22.—*The lineage of David.* This book closes with a genealogy. Readers of the Scriptures may sometimes have felt perplexed at the frequency with which genealogical tables occur both in the Old Testament and in the New. There is a sufficient reason for this.

I. SCRIPTURE SANCTIONS THE INTEREST HUMAN NATURE FEELS IN GENEALOGY. No one is insensible to his own ancestry, especially if among his progenitors have been men of eminence. Interest in ancestry may be carried too far, and may spring from, and minister to, a foolish vanity, but in itself it is good. It is a witness to the dignity of human nature; it may be an inspiration to worthy deeds; it may be an incentive to transmit influences of character and culture to posterity.

II. SCRIPTURE ATTACHES SPECIAL IMPORTANCE TO THE GENEALOGY OF THE DESCENDANTS OF ABRAHAM. Israel was the chosen people, and the lineage of the tribes of Israel, and especially of Judah, was a matter of national and local, but also of world-wide, importance.

III. SCRIPTURE CAREFULLY RECORDS THE GENEALOGY OF CHRIST JESUS. He was the Son of man, the Son of David, as well as the Son of God. By evincing this, provision was made for commending Jesus to the reverence of the Hebrew people; for making manifest the fulfilment of prophecy, which was thus authenticated; for presenting the Saviour in all the power of his true humanity before the human race, as the object of faith, attachment, and devotion.

Lessons:—1. The obligations under which we individually may be laid by a pious ancestry. 2. Our debt to posterity. 3. The claims of the Son of man upon our hearts.—T.

# HOMILETICAL INDEX

## TO

### THE BOOK OF RUTH.

---

#### CHAPTER I.

THEME	PAGE
The Emigrants and their Trials ...	4
On the Book of Ruth ...	5
A Family of Bethlehem ...	5
Famine and Impoverishment ...	6
Emigration ...	6
Widowhood ...	7
Marriage ...	7
Double Desolation ...	8
A Foreign Land ...	10
Longing for the Old Home ...	13
Kindness ...	14
Separation ...	14
Home Returning ...	15
Benedictions ...	15
Devoted Attachment ...	21
Constancy ...	22
Heart Wounds Re-opened ...	23
Moral Steadfastness ...	24

#### CHAPTER II.

The Harvest-Field ...	32
The Gleaner ...	33
Her Hap ...	33
Salutations ...	34
Filial Piety and Fidelity Recognised and Recompensed ...	34
The Harvest-Field again ...	39
Liberality to the Poor ...	40
Home from the Harvest-Field ...	44
Kindred and Kindness ...	45
Harvest-Time ...	45

#### CHAPTER III.

THEME	PAGE
Naomi's Maternal Solitude ...	52
Marriage, a Woman's Rest ...	55
Diligence in Business ...	55
Filial Obedience ...	55
The Joy of Harvest ...	56
Benediction ...	56
A Virtuous Woman ...	57
Respect for Others' Rights ...	57
Generosity ...	57
Sit Still ! ...	58
Thoughtful Love ...	58
The Work of Winnowing ...	58
Above Rubies ...	59
Woman's Influence ...	59

#### CHAPTER IV.

The Bridal of Boaz and Ruth ...	65
Little Obed ...	67
A Primitive Council ...	68
The Goël ...	68
Our Own Inheritance ...	69
Honourable Conduct Honourably Witnessed ...	69
The Name of the Dead ...	69
Good Wishes ...	70
The Birth of a Son ...	70
The Birth-Hour ...	71
The Benevolent Happiness of Old Age ...	71
The Lineage of David ...	71