

## THE BOOK OF RUTH.

### *Ruth i.*

1 Now it came to pass in the days when the Judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Beth-lehem-judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons.

2 And the name of the man was Elimelech, and the name of his wife Naomi, and the name of his two sons Mahlon and Chilion. And they came into the country of Moab, and continued there.

3 And Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died; and she was left, and her two sons.

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

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

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

7 Wherefore she went forth out of the place where she was, and her two daughters in law with her.

8 And Naomi said unto her daughters in law, Go, return each to her mother's house;

The Lord deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead, and with me.

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

14 And they lifted up their voice, and wept: and Orpah kissed her mother in law; but Ruth clave to her.

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

16 And Ruth said, Entreat me not to leave thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God:

19 So they two went until they came to Beth-lehem. And it came to pass, when they were come to Beth-lehem, that all the city was moved about them, and they said, Is this Naomi?

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

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

22 So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter in law, with her.

**C**OMMENTATORS differ as to the exact period when this book was written and as to the Judge who ruled Israel at that time.

It must have been, however, in the beginning of the days when the Judges ruled, as Boaz, who married Ruth, was the son of Rahab, who protected the spies in Joshua's reign. Some say that it was in the reign of Deborah. Tradition says that the Messiah was descended from two Gentile maidens, Rahab and Ruth, and that Ruth was the

daughter of Eglon, King of Moab; but this is denied, as Boaz, whom Ruth married, judged Israel two hundred years after Eglon's death. However widely the authorities differ as to Ruth's genealogical tree, they all agree that she was a remarkably sincere, refined, discreet maiden, a loving daughter and an honored wife.

Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, is severely criticised by Biblical writers for leaving his people and his country when in distress and seeking his fortune among the heathen Moabites, thus leading his sons into the temptation of taking strange wives. They say that the speedy deaths of the father and the sons were a proof of God's disapprobation. Naomi manifested such remarkable goodness and wisdom as a widow, that one wonders that she did not use her influence to keep her husband in his native land to share the trials of his neighbors.

The tender friendship between Ruth and Naomi, so unusual with a mother-in-law, has been celebrated in poetry, in prose and in art the world round. The scene between Naomi and her daughters in parting was most affectionate. As soon as Naomi decided to return to her own country, her daughters assisted her in making the necessary preparations. Ruth secretly made her own, having decided to go with Naomi to the land of Judea.

When the appointed day arrived, mounted on three gray jackasses, they departed. A few miles out Naomi proposed to rest by the roadside and to say farewell, and, after thanking them for all the love and kindness they had shown her, advised them to go no farther, but return to their home in that land of plenty. She told them frankly that she had no home luxuries to offer, life with her would for them be poverty and privation in a strange land, and she was not willing that they should sacrifice all the pleasures of their young lives for her. Sad and lonely with the loss of their husbands, parting with Naomi seemed to intensify their grief. United in a common sorrow, the three women stood gazing in silence into each other's faces, until Naomi, with her usual self-control and common sense, again pointed out to them all the hardships involved in the change which they proposed.

Her words made a deep impression on Orpah. She hesitated,

and at last decided to abide by Naomi's advice; but not so with Ruth. Naomi had a peculiar magnetic attraction for her, a charm stronger than kindred, country or ease. Her expressions of steadfast friendship in making her decision were so tender and sincere that they have become household words. She said: "Entreat me not to leave thee; for whither thou goest I will go, and where thou lodgest I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God; where thou diest will I die, and there will I be buried. The Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me." (These words are on a bronze tablet on the stone over the grave of Robert Louis Stevenson at Samoa.)

Having bade farewell to Orpah, they journeyed together and made a home for themselves in Bethlehem. Naomi owned a small house, lot and spring of water on the outskirts of the town. After a few days of rest, Ruth said to Naomi, I must not sit here with folded hands, nor spend my time in visiting neighbors, nor in search of amusement, but I must go forth to work, to provide food and clothes, and leave thee to rest. As it was the season for the wheat and barley harvests, Ruth heard that laborers were needed in the fields. It was evident that Ruth believed in the dignity of labor and of self-support. She thought, no doubt, that every one with a sound mind in a sound body and two hands should earn her own livelihood. She threw her whole soul into her work and proved a blessing to her mother. So Naomi consented that she might go and glean in the fields with other maidens engaged in that work.

When Naomi was settled in Bethlehem she remembered that she had a rich kinsman, Boaz, whose name means strength, a man of great wealth as well as wisdom. Ruth was employed in the field of Boaz; and in due time he took note of the fair maiden from Moab. In harvest time he needed many extra hands, and he came often among the reapers to see how the work went forward. He heard such good accounts of Ruth's industry, dignity and discretion that he ordered his men to make her work as easy as possible, to leave plenty for her to glean and to carry home in the evening. This she often sold on the way, and bought something which Naomi needed.

Naomi and Ruth enjoyed their evenings together. Naomi did

not spend the day in idleness either. She had her spinning-wheel and loom to make their garments; she worked also in her garden, raising vegetables, herbs and chickens; and they talked over their day's labor as they enjoyed their simple supper of herb tea, bread and watercresses. Their menu was oft times more tempting, thanks to Ruth's generous purchases on her way home. Being busy, practical women, their talk during the evening was chiefly on "ways and means;" they seldom rose to the higher themes of pedagogics and psychology, subjects so familiar in the clubs of American women.

E. C. S.

*Ruth ii.*

1 And Naomi had a kinsman of her husband's, a mighty man of wealth, of the family of Elimelech; and his name was Boaz.

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

4 And, behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem . . .

7 And she said, I pray you, let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves: so she came.

8 Then said Boaz unto Ruth, Hearst

thou not, my daughter? Go not to glean in another field, neither go from hence, but abide here fast by my maidens: . . . . It hath fully been shewed me, all that thou hast done unto thy mother-in-law since the death of thine husband; and how thou hast left thy father and thy mother.

19 And her mother-in-law said unto her, Where hast thou gleaned to-day? and where wroughtest thou? blessed be he that did take knowledge of thee. . . . And Ruth said, the man's name is Boaz. . . . And Naomi said unto her, The man is near of kin unto us, one of our next kinsmen.

It was a custom among the Israelites, in order to preserve their own line, that the nearest kinsman should marry the young widow on whom their hopes depended. So when Naomi remembered that Boaz was her kinsman, and that as age made marriage with her undesirable, Ruth would be the proper person to fill her place. With great tact on their part Naomi's wishes were accomplished.

Boaz was the son of Salmon and Rahab, and according to the Chaldee was not only a mighty man in wealth but also in wisdom, a most rare and excellent conjunction. Boaz was of the family of Elimelech, of which Ruth, by marriage, was a part also. Moreover, as she had adopted the country of Naomi and was a proselyte to her faith, her marriage with Boaz was in accordance with Jewish custom. Naomi was told by the spirit of prophecy, says the Chaldee, that from

her line should descend six of the most righteous men of the age, namely, David, Daniel, his three compeers and the King Messiah.

Commentators say that Boaz was probably himself one of the elders, or the aldermen, of the city, and that he went up to the gates as one having authority, and not as a common person. They say that Ruth was neither rich nor beautiful, but a poor stranger, "whose hard work in the fields" had withered her "lilies and roses." But Boaz had heard her virtue and dignity extolled by all who knew her. The Chaldee says, "house and riches are the inheritance from fathers; but a prudent wife is more valuable than rubies and is a special gift from heaven." Boaz prized Ruth for her virtues, for her great moral qualities of head and heart. He did not say like Samson, when his parents objected to his choice, "her face pleaseth me."

In narrating the story of Ruth and Naomi to children they invariably ask questions of interest, to which the sacred fabulist gives no answer. They always ask if Ruth and Naomi had no pets when living alone, before Obed made his appearance. If the modern historian may be allowed to wander occasionally outside of the received text, it may be said undoubtedly that they had pets, as there is nothing said of cats and dogs and parrots, but frequent mention of doves, kids and lambs, we may infer that in these gentle innocents they found their pets. No doubt Providence softened their solitude by providing them with something on which to expend their mother love.

*Ruth iv.*

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

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

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

4 And I thought to advertise thee, saying, Buy it before the inhabitants, and before the elders of my people. If thou wilt re-

deem it, redeem it; but if thou wilt not redeem it, then tell me, that I may know; for there is none to redeem it beside thee; and I am after thee. And he said, I will redeem it.

5 Then said Boaz, What day thou buyest the field of the hand of Naomi, thou must buy it also of Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of the dead, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance.

6 And the kinsman said, I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I mar mine own inheritance; redeem thou my right to thyself; for I cannot.

Boaz was one of the district judges, and he held his court in the

town hall over the gates of Bethlehem. The kinsman who was summoned to appear there and to settle the case readily agreed to the proposal of Boaz to fill his place, as he was already married. He was willing to take the land; but as the widow and the land went together, according to the Jewish law of inheritance, Boaz was in a position to fill the legal requirements; and as he loved Ruth, he was happy to do so. Ruth was summoned to appear before the grave and reverend seigniors; the civil pledges were made and the legal documents duly signed. The reporter is silent as to the religious observances and the marriage festivities. They were not as vigilant and as satisfying as are the skilled reporters of our day, who have the imagination to weave a connected story and to give to us all the hidden facts which we desire to know. Our reporters would have told us how, when and where Ruth was married, what kind of a house Boaz had, how Ruth was dressed, etc., etc., whereas we are left in doubt on all of these points.

The historian does vouchsafe to give to us further information on the general feeling of the people. They all joined in the prayer of the elders that the Lord would "make the woman that is come into thine house like Rachel and like Leah, which two did build the house of Israel;" they prayed for Boaz that he might be more famous and powerful; they prayed for the wife that she might be a blessing in the house, and the husband in the public business of the town; that all of their children might be faithful in the church, and their descendants be as numerous as the sands of the sea.

In due time one prayer was answered, and Ruth bore a son. Naomi loved the child and shared in its care. But Ruth said: "The love of Naomi is more to me than that of seven sons could be." Naomi was a part of Ruth's household to the day of her death and shared all of her luxuries and her happiness.

The child's name was Obed, the father of Jesse, the father of David. The name Obed signifies one who serves. The motto of the Prince of Wales is (*ich dien*) "I serve." It is to be hoped that Obed was more profoundly interested in the problems of industrial economics than the Prince seems to be, and that he spent a more useful and practical life. If the Bethlehem newspapers had been as

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enterprising as our journals they would have given us some pictorial representations of Obed on Naomi's lap, or at the baptismal font, or in the arms of Boaz, who, like Napoleon, stood contemplating in silence his firstborn.

Some fastidious readers object to the general tenor of Ruth's courtship. But as her manners conformed to the customs of the times, and as she followed Naomi's instructions implicitly, it is fair to assume that Ruth's conduct was irreproachable. E. C. S.