

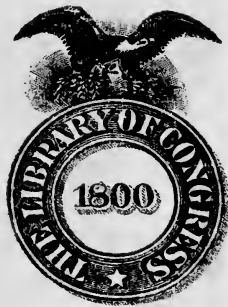
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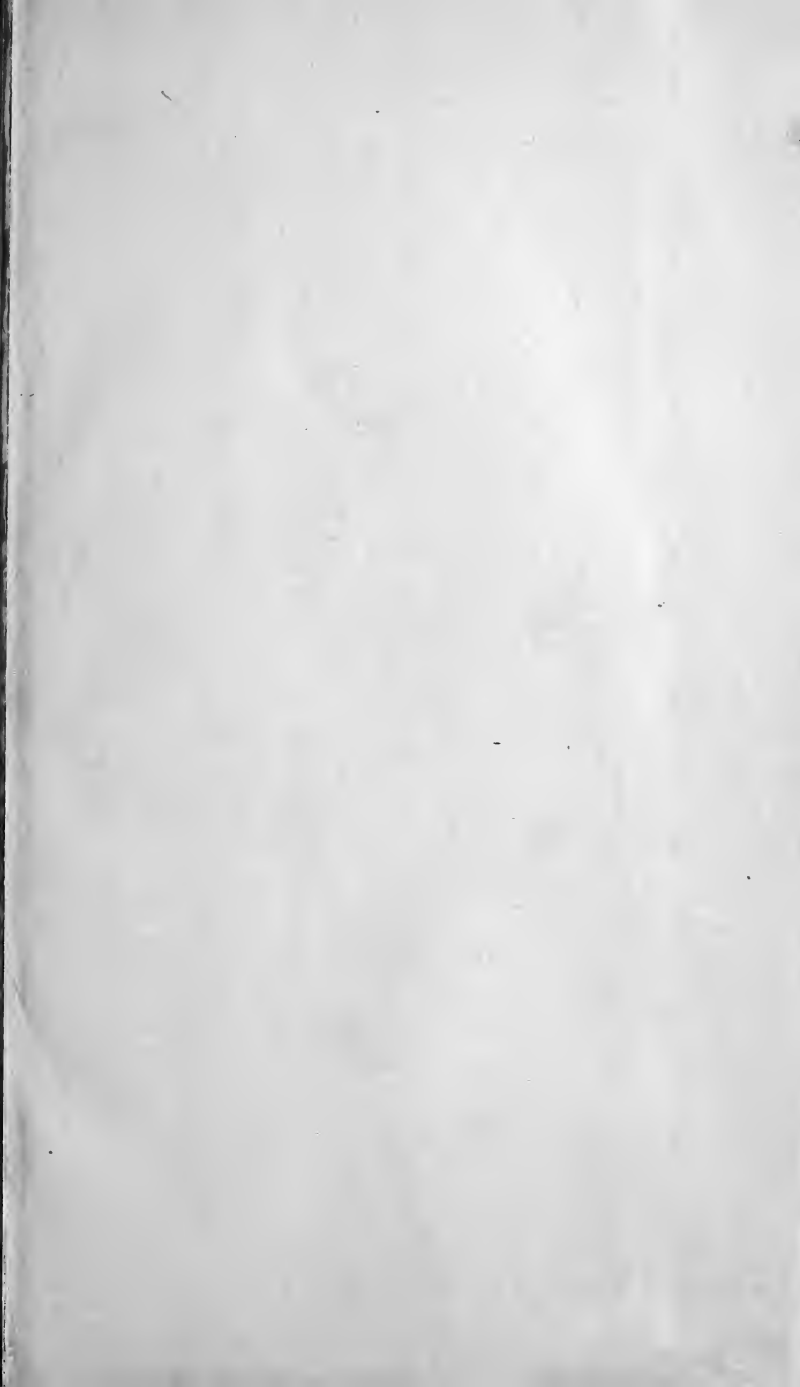
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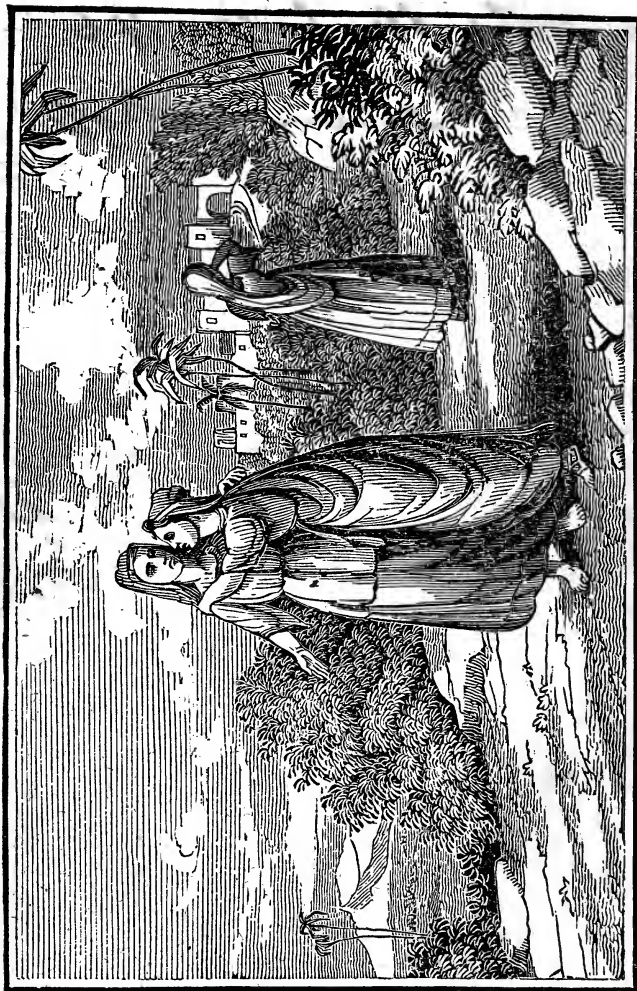
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Alcott, William Andrews

BY THE AUTHOR OF THE

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C O N T E N T S .

INTRODUCTION,	7
CHAP. I. The Moabites—who they were, and where they lived; with some Facts in their History,	19
CHAP. II. Early History of Ruth. Her Connections, Marriage, &c.	24
CHAP. III. Naomi and Ruth go to Beth- lehem,	30
CHAP. IV. Their reception at Bethlehem,	43
CHAP. V. Their Employment at Bethle- hem,	47
CHAP. VI. Ruth gleaning.—She meets with Boaz,	52
CHAP. VII. Ruth finishes her Day's Work, and returns to her Mother, . . .	61
CHAP. VIII. Conversation between Nao- mi and Ruth,	65
CHAP. IX. Ruth's Conduct. One Day at Bethlehem. General Remarks, . . .	69
CHAP. X. How Ruth spent the Sabbath,	79
CHAP. XI. A Dialogue,	91
CHAP. XII. Naomi's Advice,	106

CHAP. XIII.	Ruth's Visit to Boaz, . . .	111
CHAP. XIV.	Ruth's Return to her Mother, er,	122
CHAP. XV.	How Boaz Proceeded, . . .	131
CHAP. XVI.	Boaz and Ruth Married, .	137
CHAP. XVII.	The Conclusion,	148

INTRODUCTION.

“ ALL Scripture is given by inspiration, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect,” or that the child of God may become a perfect man, “ thoroughly furnished ” and prepared “ unto all good works.”

The Scriptures—the revealed word of truth—are to the spiritual man, all that the great book of natural truth is to the natural man. Its pages present a perpetual feast; and if, in order to partake of its heavenly viands, a little labor is required, it is no more than is true of the pages of nature’s book. Toil, in

both cases, is richly rewarded. They that labor faintly and “sow sparingly,” in either case, “reap sparingly;” but they that “sow bountifully, reap also bountifully.”

He who peruses, with interest, the inspired pages, will find them “profitable for doctrine.” There “shine the noblest truths.” There, whatever is excellent in morals, or true in religion, is embodied in the plainest and simplest manner; so that way-faring men, though fools, need not materially err. It may not, indeed, always be arranged as we find it in our catechisms and formularies; but it is there;—and however we may regard the utility of the plan, the arrangement was made by Infinite Wisdom itself.

The inspired pages are profitable also for “reproof.” The Bible presents nearly every essential variety of human character, from the best to the worst.

It shows us the virtuous struggling with adversity, and coming off more than victorious; it shows us the same character, now virtuous, and basking in the sunshine of prosperity, and now sinking in the most humiliating depths of guilt and wo. Here we see vice for a while lifting up her brazen face with an air of triumph; anon we see her reaping the due reward of her deeds. We see the fate both of guilty individuals and nations; we witness the elevation and ultimate exaltation of the feeble but heavenly-minded slave, and of the small, but virtuous and pious nation. We see, and we approve. Especially do the details of vice, and its ultimate punishment, justify so clearly the wisdom of the ways of God to man, that while we read, we are "reproved and corrected;" and it is our own fault, and not that of the Scriptures, if they are not profitable to us "for in-

struction in righteousness ; if our hearts are not made better.

How is it possible for an ingenuous youth to read the biography with which the Bible abounds, and not see the excellence of virtue and piety! How possible to avoid the inference, that, were this life the measure of our existence even, the ways of wisdom are pleasant, and all her paths peace! How is it possible to behold the chicanery, the dissimulation, the intrigue, the meanness, the impurity, the guilt and the degradation of bad men, without feeling that there is a way which, though it seem pleasant to a man, the end thereof is death!

Who can read the travels and voyages of the various characters, set forth in the Bible—especially those of Christ and his apostles and early followers,—without being enlightened and strengthened to pursue, with humble trust in

God, and with new vigor, the journey of life—that journey so often spoken of as a mere pilgrimage—whose end, if rightly pursued, opens, at last, into fields of immortal bliss?

Who can look at the history of various tribes and nations, as there recorded, and not see that “at what time God sees fit to pluck down and to destroy, or to build up” and elevate a nation according to its virtue or vice, no human art or effort can prevent, frustrate, or defeat? That He doeth according to His will, not only in the armies or hosts of Heaven, but among the inhabitants of the earth; and that none can say to him, with impunity, “What doest thou?”

How is it possible for a person who has the least sensibility or sympathy in his nature, to read the charming moral lessons of this blessed book, and not receive any permanent good impressions?

Of what material must such an individual be composed?

In the value of these lessons, as a means of general improvement, there is no doubt a great difference to different individuals. One would be most benefited by biography; another prefers history; another is fond of poetry; another is charmed with travels; another prefers the parts which exhibit feeling—especially devotional feeling;—another still, prefers philosophy and doctrine. For all these various tastes of its numerous readers, the Bible is an almost inexhaustible store-house. It is surprising to those who have but recently begun to search for its treasures, how much material for thought and reflection it contains; how much for intellectual, social, moral and physical elevation and improvement.

Perhaps among all its stores of narrative and biography, there is no por-

tion, occupying the same amount of space, so replete with instruction as the book of Ruth. But it is not merely instructive, like the dry lessons of philosophy or mathematics; it is thrilling with interest, and teeming with human nature.

Some persons have overlooked, or rather slighted, this part of the Divine record. They have taken a superficial view of it, and fastidiously concluded it was hardly worthy of general attention, especially in mixed society. It was once the mistake of the writer of this volume, to entertain such sentiments:

Within a few months, a friend whom he esteemed, begged him to examine with attention the book of Ruth. He promised to do so. This little volume is among the fruits of that examination. He does not propose it as a substitute for the original—by no means. If it

shall succeed in awakening an interest in the Scripture account itself, and lead others to conclusions similar to those which have been fostered in his own mind; his highest hopes in regard to its utility will be fully realized. He regards the book of Ruth as among the happiest pieces of narrative—were it viewed merely as a thing human—that the world has ever seen.

Here is an indigent female, born among a rude people, regarded by the surrounding nations as “outcasts” and savages, working her way by her perseverance, her industry, her virtue, her piety, her innocence, her artlessness, her sweetness, and her simplicity, to the highest respectability, and into the walks of the most refined circles of a comparatively refined people. We behold her accomplishing all this, too, so far as we can ascertain, without being puffed up by her change of condition;

even though she became the mistress of a splendid mansion or palace, and the wife of a prince and judge, if not the mayor of the ancient and distinguished city of Bethlehem.

Nor is this all. We behold, in this once obscure female, the progenitor of David, the sweet singer as well as king of Israel, and of course, according to the flesh, the progenitor of our blessed Lord and Savior. The Chaldee writings say, in addition, that from the same line descended the four illustrious captive Jews of Babylon, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.

This little volume is designed for Bible classes, as well as Sabbath schools. Nor would it be amiss if it should find its way into the hands of not a few parents. For unless the writer is greatly mistaken in regard to the intrinsic merit of sacred narrative, and especially of the portion here considered, it is, like

the holy gospel itself, "worthy of all acceptance," and should not stand unread, and unreflected on in families. How many a child might have been encouraged by the example of Ruth, explained and illustrated at the domestic fireside, to resist temptation, escape crime and its punishment; and through good report and through evil, pursue life's course, if with faltering, yet with sure footsteps, along the straight and narrow way that leads up to the heavenly Paradise—to those blest fields, "fast by the throne of God."

W. A. A.

Boston, October, 1835.

STORY OF RUTH.

CHAP. I.

The Moabites—who they were, and where they lived; with some Facts in their History.

How many hundred times have I read in the Bible about the Moabites, without a single thought what sort of people they were, or where they lived; only that they lived somewhere not far from the land of Canaan. Now I will tell you where they lived, and from whom they descended. Indeed, it is very necessary that I should do so, because Ruth, whose story I am going to relate, was one of them.

If you look in the thirteenth chapter of Genesis, you will find that when the keepers of the flocks and herds of Abraham and Lot quarrelled with each other,

Abraham and Lot agreed to separate; and Lot took his choice, what part of the country to live in. The region which he selected, was that through which the river Jordan runs, called the "Plain of Jordan." It was about ten miles wide, including both sides of the river, and was a very rich country; but the soil was richest about the mouth of the river, where it emptied into the Dead Sea. By this sea stood the famous cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, near which Lot himself chiefly dwelt.

Lot had two sons, Moab and Ammon: Moab was born at about the same time with Isaac, the son of Abraham; that is, about the year of the world 2100, or more than 3700 years ago. When he left his father's house, and began to have a family of his own, he settled on the east side of the Jordan, quite below its mouth, or rather on the east side of the Dead Sea.

If you look on some map of Palestine (say Mr. Ingraham's) you will find a small river running into the Dead Sea,

on the eastern, or rather north-eastern side of it, called the river Arnon. The country which Moab and his descendants lived in, lay about this river, but chiefly south of it. The capital city lay near or upon it. This country was called Moab, after its first settler.

When the Israelites, after being many years in the deserts of Arabia, undertook to pass along the eastern side of the Dead Sea, through Moab, the country of which I have been speaking, Balak, the king of the Moabites, and his princes, opposed them. It is on this occasion, that we hear so much about Balaam, a very singular man, whom Balak sent for, from the east, to come to him and curse the Israelites. The latter, however, finally went through the country, but were not permitted to destroy any part of it, or its people; although they had hindered their journey, and treated them ill besides.

It was in or near the northern part of this country that Mount Nebo was situated,—the hill which Moses ascended,

in order to view Canaan, the country to the north-west, on the opposite or western side of the Jordan; which, you know, he was not allowed to enter. It was here, in the land of Moab, too, that this wonderful man died; and it was somewhere on the plain, near the Dead Sea, that he was buried; though nobody ever knew exactly where, except God, and the celestial messengers whom he employed to perform for him this last sad office.

I do not think Moab, the father of the Moabites, was a very good man himself. But whether he was so, or not, his people became very wicked after him; and the Israelites had great trouble with them. These troubles were greatly increased, as it would seem, by intermarriages with the women of Moab, and by other imprudent and wicked conduct. From this, and perhaps various other causes, arose a great hatred between the Israelites and the Moabites, and many wars. Eglon, one of the kings of Moab, some time after Joshua's death,

greatly oppressed the Israelites; but he was killed by Ehud, one of their Judges, and the Moabites were driven out of the country. The Israelites usually held the Moabites in subjection; but sometimes they were rather too strong for them.

We may say, in general, that the country of the Moabites lay about fifty miles south-eastward of Jerusalem; and the Dead Sea was between. The events which are related in the following chapters, are supposed to have taken place about 2700 years after the creation of Adam and Eve, or nearly 3150 years ago.

CHAP. II.

Early History of Ruth.—Her Connections, Marriage, &c.

RUTH, the subject of the following narrative, was born in Moab, but as to her infancy, childhood, education, &c., the Scriptures are silent. As the Moabites, however, were ignorant of the true God, there is little doubt that, like the rest of her nation, she was brought up an idolater. The Jews have a tradition, that she was the daughter of Eglon, king of Moab; but this, from the Bible account, does not seem at all probable.

But though born in a wicked nation, and bred an idolater, Ruth possessed many good qualities. Such instances have often been known. Even in the very wilds of Africa and America, and among savages, you will find some people—females especially—whose characters are, in several respects, amiable and excellent.

Some may suppose that Ruth's good qualities were the result of her trials.

It may be so; but even this would render it probable that she had a good disposition in the first place; for adversity, sickness and the loss of friends, makes bad people worse, quite as often as it makes them better. It is only those, whose hearts are already right in the sight of God, who are sure to be improved by their trials.

But as I have mentioned Ruth's trials, I will tell you first what they were; and this will lead us to the more interesting parts of her history.

Do you know where Bethlehem was? It was about five miles southward of Jerusalem. Its situation was high and healthy, and you could see a great way from it to the south-east, quite to the Dead Sea, which divided it from the land of Moab.

Bethlehem is a very interesting place. It was the residence of many good and great men; among the rest, of Jesse, the father of king David; and here king David was born. Bethlehem was the birth place, too, of our Savior; though this was never long his place of residence.

Among the good men who have resided in Bethlehem was Elimelech. Elimelech had a wife whose name was Naomi, and two sons, Mahlon and Chilion. *Mahlon* means *sickly*, and *Chilion* means *consumption*; for the Hebrew names *always* meant *something*; and very often they expressed the real character of the persons who bore them. Whether in the present case, the two brothers were really feeble, as their names might imply, is uncertain; but there are reasons for thinking that they were, as we shall very soon see.

The land of Canaan was subject to famine; and Judea, in which Bethlehem was situated, was a part of Canaan. You will recollect the very remarkable famine in the time of Joseph, which was a great while before the days of Elimelech; and also one which took place many years afterward, in the time of Elijah; when hardly anything grew for men or beasts to eat, for more than three years.

Now there was one of these famines in the time of Elimelech. It does not

appear to have proved so distressing as many others were, still it was a famine; and people were somewhat frightened, and Elimelech among the rest. But what could be done?

I will tell you what was done by Elimelech. The famine did not extend so far as the land of Moab. Elimelech was informed of this, and as it was only two or three days' journey around the north end of the Dead Sea to go there, he arranged his affairs at home, and removed among the Moabites, intending to stay there till the famine was over.

Many who have read the story in the Bible, blame Elimelech for removing. They say he might as well have staid at home as other people; for we do not know that any others removed. In his own country, the true God was known and worshiped, and he had many privileges, which he could not have in other countries. Besides, the land of Moab was one of the worst places to live in, and bring up a family of children in, that he could possibly have selected. Many

say that he ought to have trusted in God, and remained where he was.

Perhaps he did wrong. It is probable that he was very fond of property, and that one object in going out to Moab, or at least in remaining there, after he had arrived, was to get property faster than he could get it in his own country. He already possessed much property, and the more people have, the more, usually, they are anxious to obtain.

How many people who are in comfortable circumstances, remove to new countries, to get property faster, and to be able, as they say, to provide better for their children, as they grow up to manhood; although in so doing they often shut themselves out from schools and public worship on the Sabbath, and from good society; and become the means of leading their children into such habits that property is of no consequence to them!

But to return to Elimelech. Some years after his removal into the land of Moab, he died. After his death, his two

sons, Mahlon and Chilion, married in the country. This was a wrong step. It was the custom of their countrymen, and appeared to be more agreeable to the will of God, to marry among their own nation. And Moab was not so far away from Judea but what they might easily have gone thither in pursuit of companions, had they chose. Above all, they ought not to have married among such a vicious people as the Moabites.

But God, who often brings good out of *evil*, so ordered things, as to bring about good results from these mistakes of Mahlon and Chilion. For though the two young men did not live very long after their marriage, they appear to have lived very happily with their wives. The latter survived them many years, and their history is very instructive. One of the widows was Ruth, the subject of this narrative; the name of the other was Orpah.

CHAP. III.

Naomi and Ruth go to Bethlehem.

WE have seen that Naomi, and Ruth, and Orpah, were now all widows, and that Naomi was in a land of strangers. No wonder she grew anxious to return to her own country, and watched, with great anxiety, the cessation of the famine. Naomi—whatever we may think of her husband—was evidently a woman of piety; and if, along with her husband, she had ever entertained any high notions, it is most probable that her afflictions and trials had proved the means of humbling her.

The famine had at length ceased. Naomi had “heard in the country of Moab, how that the Lord had visited his people in giving them bread.” How long she remained in the land of Moab, after she heard this welcome intelligence, is unknown. At length, however, she began to make preparation to return to Bethlehem.

In setting out on her journey, her two

daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth, accompanied her. She seems to have had no servant with her, to attend her, or see to her baggage; and perhaps she urged Orpah and Ruth to go a little way with her, to see to her effects, or perhaps they chose to go, out of civility and kindness.

If this attention of Orpah and Ruth to their mother-in-law, was nothing more than a mere act of kindness, it yet shows us that they had lived together on good terms, and were sorry to separate. Mothers-in-law, and daughters-in-law, do not always live very happily together; and therefore when they *do*, as in the case before us, it is very much to the credit of both the two parties.

How *far* Orpah and Ruth intended to go, when they set out, it is impossible, perhaps, to conjecture. It might have been their purpose to go as far as the borders of their own country, and then return. If so, Ruth, on her journey, altered her purpose; as we shall see presently.

Having traveled on together as far as Naomi thought it best for her daughters to go, she embraced them both, in the most tender and affectionate manner, and begged them to return each to the family of her mother; for their own mothers, it would seem, were still living, in the land of Moab. She trusted, she said, that they would marry again, and live as happily with their new, as once they had with their former husbands.

At first, Orpah and Ruth both refused to leave her, and insisted on going home with her. Among the Jews, and especially in those days, if a husband died, without any children, it was the duty of his brother, if he had any, to marry his widow; for it was deemed important and honorable to raise up a family to bear the father's name. And if there was no brother of the deceased, then the duty of marrying the widow devolved on the nearest male relation. This was so generally the custom, and was thought so very proper, that the persons concerned, whether males or females, did not scru-

ple to speak of it just as they did of any other common occurrence.

Although Ruth and Orpah were both greatly attached to Naomi, it is possible that one object in view in going to Bethlehem with her, was, that their loss might be partly made up; by marriage with Mahlon and Chilion's nearest relations. This idea is confirmed by what Naomi said to them to dissuade them from going. She told them plainly, that if she should marry again, and have a second family of sons, they would be so young, that it would be improper for Ruth and Orpah to wait till they were grown men, before they married.

She reasoned with them a long time; but however strong their affections were towards their own mothers, and their other near relatives in the land of Moab, they were still more strongly attached to Naomi, and could not bear to part with her. They "lifted up their voice and wept" repeatedly. At last, Orpah concluded to return, and again kissing her mother-in-law, bade her a last farewell.

And what became of her? The Bible does not tell. Perhaps she went back, some of you may say to yourselves, and having learned by the example of her mother-in-law, how much better the Jewish religion was than the idolatrous worship of her own country, spent her life in teaching it to her neighbors and friends. No; this was not the fact. It is pretty evident, from the little we are told respecting her, that she finally returned to the worship of idols, with the rest of the Moabites.

It is very difficult to live where the people are all bad, and not catch the disease; that is, become bad like them. Can one tread on live coals and not be burnt? says the Scripture, alluding, if I mistake not, to this very difficulty.

Yes; it is possible, though difficult. Joseph was tried in a very hot furnace of affliction at the court of Pharaoh, and yet not burnt; and with the help of God, others may "go and do likewise." Orpah might have done so; but, from what follows, it is nearly certain that

she did not. Had she possessed the right feelings and disposition, she would not, I think, have returned, but would have done as Ruth did. How was that? I will tell you.

When Orpah had bid her mother farewell, and was going away, the mother turned to Ruth, and urged her once more to go with Orpah. It has surprised some readers that she could have given her such advice, and yet have been sincere. She loved Orpah and Ruth both: why then should she advise them to leave her?

The case, I think, was as follows: Naomi was a good woman; but she was willing to try her daughters-in-law, on an occasion like this. She did not wish them to go to Bethlehem merely for the love they bore to her; but if they went, she wished them to go out of regard, also, to the God whom she, and her brethren the Jews, worshiped. She wished them to count the cost beforehand. People are more apt to set out on an expedition than to persevere. It

is well, always, to look at the worst side of a case; and not be rash, and begin a work to-day, which we shall be sorry to-morrow that we had not let alone. When a certain person, in the heat of his zeal, told the Savior he would follow him, let him go where he might, the Savior told him that he "had not where to lay his head;" as much almost as to say, "Do not be hasty. Consider well the matter, and whether you can fare as I do." Naomi dealt much in the same way with Orpah and Ruth, and Orpah, as we have seen, turned back.

But Ruth was not to be persuaded so easily. She seems to have made up her mind; and to have left her native country, and her kindred according to the flesh, for ever. Her reply to her mother-in-law showed this beyond a doubt, and settled the question. "Entreat me not to leave thee," said she, "or to return from following after thee; for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God, my God.

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

Here was the true spirit of filial affection. All children ought to have the same strong affection for their good parents and friends that Ruth had for her mother-in-law. I do not say that they ought, like Ruth, always to stay by them, and never to leave them till they die; though I think that some member or members of every family ought to do so. In no other way can we repay the vast debt we owe our parents and grandparents, for what they have done for us, in our tender years, than by bringing up, with the same care and perseverance, families of our own, and standing by them in their declining years, and supporting and comforting them. But where there are large families, it may be, and often is, the duty of some of the children, to leave home for a while, perhaps for ever. In such cases, they should be willing to go. They should have a

desire to stay, as strong, if you please, as Ruth's was; but yet they should be more anxious to do just what Divine Providence seems to say they ought to do, than merely to gratify their own inclinations.

In the last clause of what Ruth said to Naomi,—“The Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me,” Ruth seems to have confirmed what she had been saying with an oath. I do not see that there was any necessity of doing this; but the historian says she did it. I suppose Naomi would have believed her resolution was a strong one, without it; but oaths were very fashionable in those days. I speak now of *solemn* oaths, such as Ruth's no doubt was. Oaths, on common occasions, every body of good sense ought to condemn.

In the “Chaldee paraphrase” (as it is called) of this part of the Bible, the conversation between Naomi and Ruth, which I have just mentioned, is related somewhat differently. It is so curious, that, on the authority of Mr. Henry, I

will insert it here, just as it stands in his Commentary.

“Ruth said [to her mother], Entreat me not to leave thee, for I will be a proselyte. Naomi said, We are commanded to keep sabbaths, and good days, on which we may not travel above a thousand cubits (a Sabbath day’s journey). Well, says Ruth, whither thou goest, I will go. Naomi said, We are commanded not to tarry all night with Gentiles. Well, says Ruth, where thou lodgest, I will lodge. Naomi said, We are commanded to keep six hundred and thirteen precepts. Well, says Ruth, whatever thy people keep, I will keep, for they shall be my people. Naomi said, We are forbidden to worship any strange god. Well, says Ruth, thy God shall be my God. Naomi said, We have four sorts of deaths for malefactors,—stoning, burning, strangling, and slaying with the sword. Well, says Ruth, where thou diest, I will die. We have, said Naomi, houses of sepulchres. And there, said Ruth, will I be buried.”

But to go on with our narrative: Orpah having gone back to her idolatrous friends, Naomi and Ruth proceeded on their journey. What think you were their thoughts, as the land of Moab became hid behind the hills of the "farther side of Jordan," as it was called, which they were now traversing, and as they came in view of the hills of Judea, stretching as far west of the plains of the Jordan as the eye could reach? Do you think Ruth was homesick? What if she was? Her mind was made up, and she would not desire to go back. All she had to do now was to go forward, and, trusting in God, carry out her own good resolutions.

They were now approaching the river Jordan: how were they to get across? This I cannot tell you. The river had two banks. During the dry season, it was not twenty rods wide, and not more than two or three feet deep, and almost any one could easily wade through it; while, during another part of the year,

it overflowed its first banks, and spread out a great way, till it met another set of banks. When Joshua and the children of Israel, and Elijah and Elisha, crossed it, the water was probably up to the banks last mentioned; but would not Naomi be apt to choose a season when the river was low? * Perhaps they went up the river to a place called Bethabara, and crossed on a bridge; or perhaps there were boats or flats, on which a few persons could cross, though not a large multitude, like the children of Israel, under Joshua.

However this might have been, Naomi and Ruth crossed the river in some way, and proceeded towards Bethlehem. It was a lonesome and somewhat dangerous road to travel; but they had an Almighty Keeper, and, under his care and guidance, why should they fear? Perhaps, too, Nao-

* As they arrived in Judea in barley harvest, in May, I am convinced, the more I reflect on the subject, that the river must have been, at this time, quite fordable.

mi contrived to beguile the tedious hours by pleasing conversation with Ruth, and by instructing her in the manners, customs and habits of the country to which she was going. Ruth would need a great deal of this sort of instruction. Every body needs the instructions of those who have had more or longer experience, especially with regard to a new country, and new sort of people; and I have no doubt that Ruth felt the want of this kind of knowledge very sensibly; and attended to all that Naomi said on the subject. Meanwhile their journey was drawing to a close, and they soon reached the plains of Bethlehem.

CHAP. IV.

Their Reception at Bethlehem.

NAOMI and her daughter reached Bethlehem in a very pleasant season. The famine was now over ; the spring had been favorable ; it was now about the end of April, or the first of May ; the latter rains, as they were called, had ripened the wheat and the rye, and the earliest apples,* and the barley ; and they were just beginning their harvest of barley. The wheat harvest was a few days later. Ruth was thus introduced to the country at a favorable time to make her attached to it, and contented in it. First impressions are very strong and permanent : and it is always

* Some of my readers may be surprised to hear that they had apples in this country ; but travelers and historians represent it so. The first we hear of the apple is in Armenia, a country not far from Palestine. It was brought from this country into Europe by the Romans, I do not think, however, that apples were ever very abundant in Palestine.

a happy circumstance, when new countries, and new faces of good friends, appear well to us.

But the whole city—so the strong language of the Bible expresses it—was moved at their arrival, and they said, “Is this Naomi?” She told them not to call her Naomi, but Mara. The word *Naomi* meant *pleasant* and *amiable*; but *Mara* meant *bitter* or *bitterness*. As she left the country, ten years before, rich and prosperous and happy, but had now returned poor and destitute and unhappy; so she seemed to think that Naomi was not, at present, a proper name for her.

Still it does not appear that she indulged herself in complaining. On the contrary, poor as she was, she seems to have been quite composed, and contented with her condition. It was the people of Bethlehem who were discomposed. Her coarse clothes, her want of servants, and her wrinkled face, surprised them; for ten years, and much trouble, must have greatly altered her

appearance; and though they had probably heard of her coming and arrival, they could hardly believe it was she.

The interest which her friends and neighbors seem to have taken in her, shows how much she was beloved and respected in Bethlehem. It was true, that *some* of those who said, "Is this Naomi?" might have intended to upbraid her. They might have meant, "Is this she, that, though in good circumstances, much better than most of us, could not be contented to stay at home and brave the famine as we did, but must needs ramble off into a strange country? See, now, what she has got by it!" The greater part of them, however, seem to me to have felt very differently from all this. They thought of her former appearance, her good and well furnished house, her kindness to the miserable, her compassion for the sick and suffering, and her charity for the poor; and contrasting all this with her haggard, care-worn and wretched present appearance, it is no wonder that all they

should say—and say it in pity, and sorrow, and tenderness, too—Is this Naomi?

Whether Naomi and Ruth were permitted again to occupy the house formerly owned by Elimelech, we are not directly told; though it does not seem probable that they were. As the estate appears to have been mortgaged for debt, by Elimelech, it had probably passed into other hands, and the house into the care of new occupants. Perhaps our two friends were content to live as mere boarders in some good and virtuous family; but how this may have been, it is impossible for us to tell.

CHAP. V.

Their Employment at Bethlehem.

BUT how were Naomi and Ruth to be supported at Bethlehem? They had nothing to do—no employment, I mean, of their own. Must they beg for a living?

People who are willing to work, can usually find something to do. They may not, it is true, always be able to *choose* their employment; but it is very seldom indeed, that they are compelled to be idle. And most people, even those who are lazy, or who think themselves too good to labor, had much rather work than starve.

From what we know of them, we have every reason to believe that Naomi and Ruth were both very willing to labor; though I am not quite sure that Naomi, who was now rather old, was able to do much. What she could do, she was most undoubtedly desirous of doing; and fortunately for her, Ruth

was able and willing to work for herself and her mother too.

Many children think it a great burden to do any thing for their parents or grandparents ; and I have seen a few who would have their parents wait on them. They seem to have no idea of earning every thing which they have, as soon as they are old enough, as every child ought to do. Some children will do things for their own parents, but complain and find fault if asked to assist their other friends or their teachers, or especially a good mother-in-law.

But Ruth was none of this sort of people : she seemed just as willing to assist Naomi, and labor for her support, as well as her own, as if Naomi had been her own mother. Here is one of the finest examples for us, which can be found in the world.

Nor is any thing said in the Bible about her getting homesick. Some young people, had they been in her condition, might have said to themselves, " Fine times these ! Is this the land of Canaan,

about whose fruitfulness, except in years of famine, I have been told so much? Is this the country which "flows with milk and honey," and yet a poor girl, a stranger, must work to earn her very living, or else starve; and not only work to support herself, but also to support an aged mother-in-law? If this is the case, it were far better for me to have staid in Moab, a land of plenty; and the sooner I go back to it the better."

But she said no such thing, and had no such feelings. She was in a country where the true God was worshiped. She trusted in Him, and believed that she should be supplied. She was ready to go to work cheerfully at the first employment that offered, which was not beyond her strength.

And what employment do you think did first offer? I have already told you that it was now barley harvest. The females of Bethlehem were accustomed to work, sometimes, in the fields, as it now is in many parts of the world, especially in harvest time. It is true,

that they did not take the sickle and reap, that we know of; but they used to glean; that is, follow after the reapers, at a distance, and pick up what they left. This employment, though it darkened their complexion, made them healthy, when they did not work too hard. It would be well for the females of this country, if they were employed several hours a day in the open air, at some kind of light work.

Ruth saw the reapers at their work, and the maidens following them; and it occurred to her at once, that she, too, could glean barley. So she consulted Naomi about it; and Naomi advised her to go.

How prudent she was! Though she might have been from twenty-five to thirty years of age, she did not hesitate to ask advice of those who were still older. Not that she was ashamed to be seen in the fields, as I have already intimated; but she knew very little about the customs of the country, and thought it could do no harm, and might do great

good, to talk with her mother about it. And she thought and acted wisely.

A friend is always valuable, even at home. But how much more so, in a strange land! Thousands get into difficulty for the want of one. "Without a friend, the world is but a wilderness," says a very common school book, and immediately adds; "If you have one friend, think yourself happy." Most of my readers have many—they have parents, grandparents, brothers or sisters. These are all usually among the number of good friends; and should be regarded as such, and on every proper occasion, consulted. Ruth had but one real friend, as yet, in Bethlehem, that we know of. But she had more very soon.

Do you know how she obtained them? In what way can we ever obtain good friends—I mean besides our parents and other relatives—except by good behaviour? This is the true secret of obtaining friends. Those who behave properly, will soon find friends, everywhere.

It was in this way that Ruth, though she never had enjoyed the advantages of a good bringing up—of religious parents and teachers, and of going to school—as you have, secured good friends in the land of Canaan, as we shall see in the following chapters.

CHAP. VI.

Ruth gleaning.—She meets with Boaz.

NAOMI, though poor, had rich relatives. Among them was Boaz, the son of Salmon, a branch of the same family with that to which Elimelech her husband belonged. He was said to be a “*mighty* man of wealth.” What is meant by the word *mighty*, in this connection, I do not know; perhaps he was mighty in the Scriptures; that is, a learned doctor of the Jewish law, as some suppose.

At any rate, he was a man of wealth;

and a part of his wealth consisted of landed estate. As it was now harvest time, he had a great number of laborers reaping in his fields near to Bethlehem, under the care of a steward or overseer; and many young women were gleaning after them.

As Ruth went out to glean barley, it happened—for it appears to have been what we call an accident—that she went into the very field where the laborers of Boaz were at work. The employment of gleaning was free to any body. The law of the Jews did not permit the owner of a field to go over it a second time, or glean it, whether the crop was fruit or grain. He was obliged to leave that which was scattered in going over it the first time, for the poor, the fatherless, and the widow;—for just such people, in one word, as Ruth was. No wonder then, if Ruth had gone boldly into the field to glean when and where she pleased, without making any apology; but she chose not to do so, as we shall see presently.

Before she had been long in the field, Boaz, the owner, came into it. Though he was a "mighty man of wealth," he does not appear to have been proud or haughty. If he did not actually labor with his own hands—for it sometimes happens that the rich have so much business, that they find no time to work themselves—he was not ashamed to go to the field and see his overseer, and consult with him, as well as converse with and encourage the workmen. Those who toil hard for another person, think much better of him, and work much more cheerfully, and do their work better, if he visits them occasionally, than if he does not. There is an old proverb, that "the master's eye makes a fat horse;" and another, equally in point, which is, "If you want your business done, go yourself; if not, send."

Boaz understood all this, and acted accordingly. He came into the field where the reapers were and spake kindly to them. The Scripture language is, "The Lord be with you." They also answered

him in the same kind manner: "The Lord bless thee." No ill will seems to have existed between them, because one party was rich and the other poor: quite the contrary. Nor did they—such at least appears to have been the fact—fall to complaining about, or slandering him, as soon as his back was turned away from them. They not only regarded him as a good master, but at the same time as an equal, and a friend. Their language also, on both sides, seems to imply that they were not only kindly disposed to each other, but that they were pious people. If the reapers, or the majority of them, were really men that feared and loved God, this will account for that kind and respectful treatment of Ruth, while in the field, at which some of us might otherwise wonder.

Boaz, in passing, had observed a female among the gleaners, whom he was not accustomed to see there; and on going to the reapers, he gave them particular directions not to insult or touch her, but to treat her respectfully and kindly; not

suspecting, however, who it was. It is a sign of a good master, when he takes so much pains as this, not to have his servants or laborers insult or injure those around them.

After a little conversation with the reapers, and setting all right in regard to their work, if any thing was wrong, Boaz asked his overseer what young damsel it was—a stranger—that he saw gleaning. “It is the Moabitish damsel,” said he, “that came back with Naomi, out of the country of Moab.”

The overseer, finding Boaz anxious to know particulars, gave him a full account of all the circumstances; how she came to him in the morning, and instead of gleaning without permission, as she might lawfully have done, as she was a stranger and a widow, in poverty, asked for the favor. He said, also, that she was very industrious; that from the time she began her labor in the morning, till Boaz came—which appears to have been nearly noon—she had not stopped but once; and that was in the heat of the day, to take a little repose, or perform her devotions, or both.

Boaz was very much pleased with the account given by his overseer. He ventured to go to her himself, and calling her his daughter, advised her to continue to glean in his fields among his maidens; that she would not better her condition by going any where else, especially where there were none of her own sex, assuring her that his servants and workmen would treat her with all possible tenderness and respect; which was more than he could have promised her in regard to others,—those over whom he had no control. He not only told her to drink freely of the water which he had provided for the young men who were reaping, (for water was the drink used by the Bethlehemites during harvest,) but also to partake freely of all their entertainments.

Such kindness for a person so much above her as Ruth considered Boaz, surprised her; and in her amazement she could not help falling down on her face before him, and acknowledging his kindness; at the same time modestly in-

quiring why he should show her, a poor stranger, so many favors.

Boaz then told her what he heard of her kind treatment and tender attachment to Naomi; and of her giving up, for her sake and for the sake of the true God and the Jewish religion, all her friends in Moab, and coming to live with Naomi, in her poverty, and among strangers, at Bethlehem. It seems to me most probable, that it was on this occasion that Boaz made himself known to Ruth, and showed her that he was not only a friend, but a relative of her mother-in-law. He closed his remarks by praying that God would bless her, and take care of her. Ruth, in return, treated him with all possible respect, and expressed a great deal of unfeigned humility and gratitude for his attention to her.

Little did Ruth think—if indeed the fact were so—that Boaz had already become attached to her, for he was old enough to be her father. Still less did she dream, at this early period, that she

should one day be the mistress of the very field in which she was now gleaning.

Before the conversation was ended, Boaz repeated his invitation to Ruth to come and partake freely of the entertainment prepared for the young men. It was probably now about dinner time, that is, eleven o'clock; for the Jews did not dine at two or three o'clock in the afternoon, as is becoming very fashionable now-a-days; but at eleven in the forenoon, which, though rather early, is a much better hour than two, or even *one*. It seems that Boaz had made such liberal provision for his workmen that they had enough for themselves, as well as something to spare to strangers.

When the dinner hour came, Boaz was himself present—whether by design or accident does not appear—and he sat at the table by the reapers, and helped Ruth to such things as they had, especially the parched corn (wheat or barley). One kind of food which they used, was bread dipped in vinegar; and it was offered to Ruth, but we are not told whether she partook of it or not. Many

people would not like it, especially if unaccustomed to it; and I doubt whether Ruth did. The parched grain she appears to have been fond enough of; for she ate freely of it, and had more than she wanted. When she had dined, she left the table immediately, and returned to her gleaning.

When she was gone, Boaz repeated his request to the reapers, not to disturb her in any way; but to favor her even more than other gleaners; and to leave some handfuls of the grain on purpose for her. All this might have been out of pure respect for Ruth, and friendship for Naomi; but it was certainly very remarkable, and produced remarkable results, as we shall see in the progress of the story.

CHAP. VII.

Ruth finishes her Day's Work, and returns to her Mother.

RUTH, it seems, did not eat so much at dinner, that she could not go immediately to work again. She probably ate no longer than the food strengthened her, and prepared her for action.

Some persons whom I have seen, eat as long as they can without actual pain in their stomachs. They seem to think they can never eat too much, as long as they can hold more. This greedy, gluttonous sort of people, seldom chew their food sufficiently either; they swallow it almost whole.

Others take it for granted, that if they leave off hungry, that is, just before the appetite begins to flag, they are quite temperate and moderate. This is a better rule than none; but if people do not chew their food very finely, they may still eat a great deal too much, before the appetite will become satisfied.

There is a better rule than this ;

which is to eat very slowly, and eat proper food, and masticate (chew) it well; and eat no longer than it appears to invigorate and strengthen us. When we begin to feel dull from eating, it is high time to stop. This is the best rule I know. It is the one that Ruth followed, or ought to have done.

She continued her work in the field till evening. Then she beat the barley out of what she had collected, and found it amounted to an *ephah*, which was about a bushel. And all this, too, without placing much dependence on the scattered ears which Boaz promised to leave for her. Indeed, there is room to doubt whether she meddled with them at all; for it is said that she continued to glean in the field; and as we should naturally think, just as she did before he gave her so much liberty.

How large a parcel is thus collected, ear by ear, during a long summer's day! And what a pattern of industry and of perseverance does this interesting story afford us!

When Ruth had threshed out her bushel of barley, what did she do with it? Did she ask somebody to carry it into the city for her? Or did she send for a servant to come and carry it for her, as many fashionable people now do, when they might often carry it themselves just as well? Ruth did neither. She took it up, and carried it home to her mother, herself. And it did not hurt her, that we know of, fatigued as she was. How few of our modern females could carry a bushel of barley, as Ruth did, if they would! But why not? Because they have not been accustomed to plenty of exercise, as Ruth had been.

Though Ruth kept at work all day, she did not work late at evening. She went home in good season. The day is usually long enough for people to work in, in summer, if they rise early. They should go to bed when it is night. Some might have loitered to talk with the maidens, or the reapers; but Ruth appears to have gone directly home without saying a word to any body.

And what did she do when she got home? Why, just what every good and affectionate daughter would have done, in such a case. She showed her mother her bushel of barley, and presented her with what remained of the parched corn which had been given her at dinner.

Surprised at her success, Naomi asked her where she had been gleaning that day.* So she told her what had happened; and that the name of the owner of the field, who had dealt so kindly with her, was Boaz. Then Naomi saw through the whole affair. And she said to her daughter-in-law, "Blessed be he

* Here is an excellent lesson for the young, as well as for parents. Old as Ruth was, Naomi did not hesitate to require her to give an account of herself—how and where she had spent the day;—and the latter did not hesitate to do as she required. There is not the least hint that Ruth felt as if her mother was too inquisitive, or was disposed to meddle with what did not belong to her. On the contrary, she told her, with all the simplicity of a child, every thing that had happened.

of the Lord who hath not left off his kindness to the living and to the dead.”

It is possible that Naomi had been so long in the land of Moab, that she had either partly or wholly forgotten some of her kindred in Judea. But this circumstance at once brought the matter to her mind; and so she told Ruth how it was. “The man is near of kin to us,” said she; “one of our next kinsmen.”

CHAP. VIII.

Conversation between Naomi and Ruth.

THE circumstances of the day had greatly interested both the mother and the daughter; so they continued the conversation. Ruth recollected and related all she could of the remarks of Boaz; how, among the rest, he requested her to follow his laborers and glean in his fields, as long as the harvest lasted.

Naomi approved of the plan, and

advised her to do as he had proposed. She had become a little acquainted with the other maidens that gleaned in the same fields, and was doing very well—certainly a bushel of barley a day was no mean compensation—and why, then, should she wish to go elsewhere? The young and the fickle are very fond of novelty. When doing well enough, they wish to do better. Eager for more, they are very apt to lose what they already possess.

Ruth followed the good advice of her mother and Boaz. Every morning found her early at her labor; and every evening she returned with the avails thereof to her mother. When the barley harvest was over, the wheat harvest followed it, and she continued gleanng till the close of the latter. Here, in the fields of Boaz, she laid the foundation of a good reputation in the neighborhood, and prepared the way for that permanent friendship of a very worthy man which ended not till death.

I have intimated that Ruth did not

probably converse with the reapers. Not that she thought herself better than they. By no means. But it would have been wholly improper. There is a time, the wise man Solomon has said, for *all* things; and there might have been proper times for Ruth to converse with the reapers. But young men, in harvest time, are sometimes apt to be rude; and if they have strong drink among them, insolent. Boaz understood this perfectly, and had guarded as well as he could against it, in the manner I have already told you. He had done all that it was proper or necessary for him to do. Ruth, with the aid of her mother, must do the rest.

No doubt Naomi gave her daughter good and plain instructions every evening, after she had finished her labor, how to behave; and there is as little doubt that the daughter profited from her instructions. We have already seen that she loved to go to her mother, old as she was, for advice; especially as she was a stranger, in a strange country;

and I think I might have told you more. I might have given it as my opinion that she even obeyed her commands, almost as much as if she were a child.

There are some young people of both sexes, who seem to think that as soon as they are tall enough to be called men or women, they are too old to obey parents. They seem ashamed to have it known to their mates that they are controlled in any degree, by others—even their parents. Now this is very foolish. We sometimes need the advice, the government, and it may be, the censure or the correction of our parents, after we are thirty years old. Indeed, there is no age whatever, if we are wise, that should set us wholly free from the duty of yielding, in some cases, to the will of wise and experienced parents; and—I repeat it—those young persons who think that because they are *twenty-one*, they are too old to be directed or governed, have yet to learn their own ignorance and folly!

When I think over this interesting story of Ruth, and especially at the

period when she was a poor stranger, following the reapers, near the city of Bethlehem, and gathering up the scattering heads of barley to support herself and a poor mother-in-law, imagination sometimes transports me to the spot, and I watch, or rather fancy I watch, her movements and conduct, for a whole day. For the sake of some of my young female readers, I will give them her history for the whole of one of these harvest days; premising that it is, in no small degree, the work of imagination.

CHAP. IX.

Ruth's Conduct. One Day at Bethlehem.

General Remarks.

SHE rose early, as was the custom of the Jews, generally. The sun, as it seemed to come up out of the valley of the Jordan in the east, and peep over the intervening hills upon the plains of

Bethlehem, found Ruth already awake and up. She had risen with the first rays of light that found their way to her chamber, and the first that were abroad reached her, for she had no blinds or shutters to exclude them; and she was not only awake but refreshed. She did not get up with the headache, a furred tongue, or bad mouth; or more fatigued than she was when she lay down; and for these reasons. She had not set up till ten or twelve o'clock, nor eaten a heavy meat supper, and then retired to rest immediately afterwards. On the contrary, fatigued with her day's work, and more anxious to sleep than to eat, she had barely taken a few mouthfuls of parched corn or bread, and perhaps drank a little milk, or a cup of water, and then gone to bed.

In this way it was, that when she awoke, she was ready to get up; and felt refreshed. She rose, thankful to God for preserving her through the night, and for giving her health and strength to begin another day. Then, after dress-

ing and washing, she attended to her devotional exercises. For I have already told you that she had left off worshipping idols, and now prayed several times a day, like the Jews, to the true God; that God who is a spirit, and who is to be worshiped, "in spirit and in truth."

All this was done by sunrise; and one thing more. I spoke of washing; but I meant simply the washing of the hands and face. The last thing she did before going down to help her mother get breakfast—at least I hope so—was to wash her whole body and limbs. For in the heat of summer, all persons, and especially those who work out of doors, become dirty in the progress of the day; and health requires that they should wash them. If a warm bath can be readily obtained, it is well to wash before going to bed. They ought, at the least, to take some soap suds, after being up a little while in the morning, and wet a cloth in it, and rub themselves thoroughly; and then wipe themselves dry with a coarse, dry cloth. I do not

say that Ruth did this; but if she did it, it must have promoted her health. Uncleanliness is unhealthy; and if we do not perceive that it injures us at the time—when we are young, active, and strong—we shall suffer for it, and I am afraid severely, too, when we become older.

About sunrise, or a little later, Ruth went down to help her mother get breakfast. This was no tedious task, for they did not take herb tea, or any other medicinal drink with their food then. They had bread on hand, which Naomi had baked the day before. It did not take long to prepare a clean table, and set it out with two plates, two knives and forks, some cups, and a pitcher of water, a cake of bread, and a little milk or honey. Or, if they chose to parch some wheat or barley, and set it on, this would not take above fifteen or twenty minutes.

By the time the sun had been an hour above the horizon, breakfast was finished, and leaving her mother to wash the

dishes—for she chose to do it—Ruth had put on her apron, and was on the house top watching the barley field of Boaz, to see when the reapers came. When she saw them approaching the field, she hastened down, took her barley sack, and bidding her dear mother good morning, made the best of her way thither. She was on the spot, by the time the reapers had gone over half a dozen rods of ground, and before any of the other maidens that worked with her. Her example, however, had a good effect upon them, for they came earlier and earlier every morning; till at last, most of them came as early as Ruth did.

“There comes the Moabitish woman again;” the workmen used to say. “We wonder if she does not come away without her breakfast.” And some of them, at first, said, that she probably wanted to be dependent on them for drink and refreshment. But they soon found their mistake on that point; for Ruth did not presume to taste of any thing which belonged to them, except the water of

their drinking vessels, unless urged to do so by Boaz himself.

Indeed, the reapers themselves soon learned to respect her, and to be almost afraid of her. If they were noisy, or boisterous, or rude at any time, and Ruth happened to come near, they were as silent as if their tongues had been tied. Not that she reproved them; very far from that. But they knew by her eye, by the blush that came upon her cheek, if any thing was wrong, and by her general appearance, that she was a worthy, modest, sensible woman; and they were careful what they said and did. And there are not many men or boys now-a-days, so rude as not to respect and esteem—I had almost said stand in awe of—a modest, sensible, virtuous female. There may possibly be a few such; but they are rather brutes in human shape, than real men.

But she had much more influence over the young maidens than she had over the young men; because she was more intimate with the latter. Before Ruth

came, many of them were idle; or they would sit much of their time in the shade; or talk with the reapers. But Ruth had not been with them more than six or eight days, before their whole habits were changed. They did not, indeed, work every minute of the day as hard as they could, and never say a word, not even among themselves. Oh no. Ruth did not do so. She worked very moderately; but she kept busy, except in the heat of the day. Then it is true, she sometimes stopped to rest a few minutes under the shade trees that surrounded the field, and entered into cheerful and familiar conversation. When she was rested, she returned to her work.

When the reapers stopped to dine, Ruth went home, immediately. The distance was not more than three quarters of a mile. The rest of the maidens carried their dinner—consisting of some cake and a little parched corn; and Ruth, in this respect, soon learned to imitate *them*; for she found it very fa-

tiguing to walk a mile and a half, in the middle of the day, in the hot sun.

To tell how Ruth spent the afternoon, would be little more than to repeat what I have already said. I might say, in general, however, both with regard to forenoon and afternoon, that Ruth did not sit down on the damp ground, or drink large quantities of cold drink of any sort, when she was greatly heated. In fact, she never was greatly heated; for she worked so moderately, and lived so temperately, and kept her mind in such a quiet state, that the heat did not affect her so much as it does a great many people who are less prudent and temperate.

Ruth did not always stay in the field as long as the reapers; for they sometimes staid till almost or quite dark. She had two reasons for this. The first was, that she was always anxious to have some time for conversation with her mother in the evening. The second was, that she thought it would not be

proper or respectable, to stay in the field after the dusk of the evening came. Therefore she beat out or threshed her barley long before sunset, and having put it in her sack, and placed it on her shoulder, she found herself, by a little after sunset, at home with her mother.

How was she employed during the evening? I will tell you. After supper—not after *tea*, for they had no tea then, and their supper was a light one—they sat down and talked over the events of the day. Ruth told Naomi every thing she had seen and heard that was new or curious, which she did not understand, and Naomi explained every thing in her power. In short, it was like a little school; only there was but one pupil,* and she was rather a large one.

* Why are we not always pupils at school? Why may we not consider ourselves as receiving lessons wherever we are, and whatever we hear, think, or see? Bad lessons some of them may indeed be, but we may learn something,

I need hardly tell you that Naomi and Ruth closed their conversation early. In the harvest season they had finished their devotions, and were in bed and asleep in a very little time after dark.

In closing this chapter, I ought to say, more distinctly than I have elsewhere done, that Ruth gained the affection and esteem, not only of the maidens, but of the people of Bethlehem generally. For almost every body had heard of her, either by means of Naomi, or Boaz, or the reapers, or the gleaners ; and they were at first prejudiced against her because she was a Moabite, just as we are sometimes prejudiced against people on account of their color, or name, or nation. Yet they soon forgot all that, and began to entertain the highest esteem for her. By the end of the barley harvest and

even from them. If we do not keep on learning, from every thing we hear or see, as long as we live, I greatly fear we have not the child-like spirit, and the fond desire to improve—to become wiser and better—which the good Ruth had.

wheat harvest, she had as many friends, almost, in Bethlehem, as she once had in the land of Moab; and those who could hardly be called her friends, did not hesitate to speak well of her.

CHAP. X.

How Ruth spent the Sabbath.

“AND how *did* she spend it?” you will perhaps say. This too, I am going to tell you. But I will tell you, in the first place, how she did *not* spend it.

She did not sleep an hour or two later on the Sabbath morning than on any other morning during the week, in order “to while away” as many as she could of the tedious hours which God has commanded to be kept as holy as possible.

She did not spend her Sabbaths in sauntering about the roads or fields; for the

customs of the Jews did not permit this; nor would the love she bore to her mother Naomi, who kept the Sabbath with great conscientiousness and exactness, have permitted her to do so.

She did not take up as much time as possible in dressing and preparing to go to the place of worship.

She did not contrive to devote twice as much time to cooking and preparing food on the Sabbath as on any other day, and to eat twice as much as on other days; for besides unfitting her for religious worship, she knew it must be exceedingly offensive to God.

She did not sleep away the day to get rid of it.

She did not drag herself into the place of worship, half an hour too late, and when arrived there, sit in time of prayer, or sleep in time of sermon.

She did not appear late in the Sabbath school, like many persons whom I could name; but there was a reason for this; they *had* no Sabbath schools, in those days.

She did not comply with the invitation of any of her young friends, and get into a carriage, and drive pell-mell to Jerusalem, or to some neighboring town, two or three hours before sunset, on a party of pleasure. Nor did she walk abroad a long time before sunset, "to see whatever could be seen."

She did not spend the sacred hours in reading newspapers, magazines and novels, which on any other day she could not be prevailed on to touch;—for the plain reason, if no other—that they had no such thing, in those days, to read.

Now I will endeavor to tell you how she *did* spend the Sabbath.

She asked Naomi to read to her from the Pentateuch—the five books of Moses*—whenever she could spare the time; and she used to stop her to ask her questions, whenever any thing was read she did not understand.

She seemed anxious to devote as much time as possible to the improvement of her mind and heart.

* This was all the Bible they had in the time of Ruth.

When the hour was arrived for attending the worship of the tabernacle, she got ready and went along in season, and attended to the business of the meeting while she remained.

She was willing to keep the day holy to the end of it. She believed that the Sabbath lasted a whole day and evening; and not that it began to become less and less sacred, as soon as public worship was over.

Although there was no Sabbath school, where she could go and instruct others, she did not find it necessary to be wholly idle, on the Sabbath. There were ignorant boys and girls enough in Bethlehem whom she might instruct. She could go where they lived, and talk with them, and tell them what they ought, and what they ought not to do; or she could invite them to come and see her for the same purpose.

She could visit the poor and the distressed, and the fatherless, and the sick, on that day, and do them good; even if she had nothing to give them but kind looks, and soft winning words.

She could do all this, and much more than all this. When there was nothing else to do—and sometimes when there was—she used to talk with her good mother, and learn more from her about God, and the way to keep his commandments.

The Sabbath evening, above all, was a most precious season to Ruth. For though the Jewish Sabbath was considered over when it began to grow dark,* yet it was never over to Ruth until her senses were locked in sleep. It is very true that the Jews were exact about keeping holy time, so much so that a man who was found collecting some wood together, which he might no doubt have collected just as well the day before, was stoned to death. But it is also true that this holy day can be kept strictly, without having it tedious.

I am surprised to find that some chil-

* Perhaps the reader already knows that the Jewish Sabbath began on what we call Friday evening, and ended on our Saturday, or the seventh day evening.

dren feel very miserable on the Sabbath, unless they can be moving about and doing something perpetually. To sit down quietly in their own houses, and feel it a pleasure to do so, is a thing that many seem to regard as impossible. So long as they can be occupied in the family reading and prayers, in getting the Sabbath school lesson, dressing, going to the Sabbath school, then to church to hear the prayers and singing and sermon, going home to a highly seasoned dinner, attending Sabbath school and church again in the afternoon—so long, I say, as they can keep themselves, either in body or mind, in a sort of bustle, on the Sabbath, they feel very comfortably. But when all this is over, and the supper is eaten, and the approaching evening calls them to meditation on the exercises, &c., of the day, they appear very miserable. If there is an evening meeting, they attend that, to relieve, in part, the dulness and tediousness of the hours; but if not, they are very apt either to go to reading or

thinking or conversing on subjects wholly improper for the time, or else feel themselves shut up in prison, and pass away the gloomy season as they can. And some get so tired of the Sabbath, that they actually dread its approach.

Now I doubt whether the Jewish children, generally, considered the Sabbath a tedious day, strictly as it was kept by them. How must they have been delighted—and Ruth among the rest, old as she now was—to sit down when the religious exercises were finished, and ask what such a thing was for, and what such or such a thing meant. This would lead to other inquiries about Adam and Eve, and Abel and Cain: about Noah and the flood, and about Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, Joseph, Moses, Miriam, and many others. Then, again, she would ask Naomi, and the latter would tell her the wonderful history of Joseph and Moses; what they did in Egypt; what sort of a country Egypt was; and how Moses led the Israelites out of it, through the

wilderness ; and a thousand things which every child, now-a-days, delights to hear over and over, almost a hundred times, and which were as interesting to Ruth then as to young children now.

Do any of my readers suppose that the Sabbath ever became tiresome to Ruth ? Must it not have been, on the contrary, the most pleasant season in the whole week ? Must she not have looked forward to it with great satisfaction ?

Let us think of Bethlehem, in the days of Ruth and Naomi, and the still and quiet evening of the Sabbath. The services of the sanctuary are over ; the sun is fast descending towards the western sea ; the people have taken a frugal meal of parched corn, or some other simple food, and are now engaged in giving to their families and servants, religious instruction. There, on the top of that neat little cottage, under the shade of an awning, sit Ruth and Naomi. The latter has in her hand the

books of Moses, from which, as she unrolls them, she reads to Ruth, pausing to answer her questions, or explain any thing which may seem difficult. Yonder, in the open court, sheltered in like manner from the sun's oblique but still piercing rays, sit a larger family, listening with most profound attention to what that aged sire, with venerable beard, is saying about the history of their ancient nation, and of God's dealings with it. While, within a still larger number of dwellings, where no stranger eye can penetrate, and none can witness their devotions but God himself, the master of the household is reading from the holy books to those around him, calling upon the name of his God in language so plain and simple, that every child can understand, and take an interest in the petitions; or singing, or chanting his praises.

How would one of our modern cities, in these *better days*, as we are accustomed to regard them, compare on the Sabbath, an hour before sunset, with the

ancient Bethlehem, in the days of Ruth and Naomi? Was the quiet scene of instruction of which I have been speaking, whether on the house top, in the court, or in the interior of the dwellings, interrupted by gay horsemen and coaches driving—perhaps running—through the streets? Were hundreds or thousands of boys and girls collecting on the common—if they had one—to “while away” the time? Were there parties collecting at various houses in the city to join in amusing—rather trifling—conversation, as if to efface every serious impression made by the Sabbath? Were the young gentlemen visiting the young ladies, and the young ladies receiving the calls of the young gentlemen, and spending the evening to a late hour in idle or noisy mirth in their society? And were the houses for refreshment, the confectionaries and the places of public amusement, whose doors, if shut at all during the day, had been only closed for form’s sake;—were these, I say, thrown open

at dark, or still earlier, for the reception of the gluttonous, the intemperate, the licentious, and the profane? Or were they happiest around their fireside within their own family circles, engaged in the way already described, prepared to go to rest in good season, in peace, and to rise in due season the next morning?

I am sure that Ruth the Moabitess neither gave nor received visits on Sabbath evening, and that had Naomi permitted it, she would have had no wish to do so. She was fond of amusement, no doubt, at the proper season; but who, that has common sense or common discretion, would wish to drown every good impression that the Sabbath has made, by light, amusing or trifling conversation? Young people, indeed, require action and motion in the air, a great deal of it;—it is for their health;—but they require also—and they are usually fond of it, if it is well conducted—much moral and religious instruction; and they ought to be willing to lay aside their plays, and all thought about them, for one day in

a week; and be contented with the holy amusements of the church and Sabbath school, and the family circle of instruction. It is a great mistake to keep children shut up on the Sabbath and not afford them interesting books, cheerful conversation, or good and pleasant instruction; but it is a mistake quite as serious for them to run at large, after church is over, and forget all that the preacher or the Sabbath school teacher has said; and set a bad example to others.

No; home is the best place for children—and grown persons too,—on the Sabbath evening. There is always enough to do there, if parents have the spirit of Naomi, and children that of Ruth; and of *pleasant* occupation, too. And if Ruth was not too old, or too wise, to attend to instruction at that season, instead of gadding abroad, which of my readers is?

CHAP. XI.

A Dialogue.

WE have seen, in the preceding chapter, what an excellent character Ruth bore, and how soon after she arrived in Bethlehem she gained many friends and a good reputation. All this was the more striking, from the fact that she came from a country where the women, as it was well known to the Jews, were not generally respectable. When persons from such a country prove to be truly virtuous and excellent, every body prizes them so much the higher for it; and it ought to be so. It is no hard matter at all to be good and virtuous, where goodness and virtue are in fashion; but where vice is all the fashion, and a person is educated in the midst of it, and yet comes out pure and excellent, it is certainly very much to her praise. Thus it was with Ruth, the subject of our narrative.

It was well that she did so soon establish her claims as a modest, sensible,

excellent woman; for it was not long after, that a circumstance took place, which, had not her reputation been so firmly established that it was scarcely possible to shake it, might have had an injurious effect on her. But before I relate the circumstance, some further explanation and remark may be necessary.

It has already been mentioned, that if a husband among the Israelites died, it was considered the duty of his brother to marry his widow; or if he had no brethren, then it was the duty of the next male relation. It seems to have been considered rather disreputable for young widows, like Ruth, to remain single. Or if not, perhaps there was something peculiar in Ruth's case, as what will presently follow seems to indicate.

Among the other kindnesses which Naomi was constantly showing to Ruth, she began to entertain thoughts of settling her again in life, by marriage. Not so much because she was poor, and unwilling to maintain Ruth; for the

advantage, as it seems to me, was all the other way: Ruth supported Naomi. No; it was out of pure kindness to her, or regard to her own happiness, and a wish to have her comply with the laws of God, and the Jewish customs. Some people, had they been in the place of Naomi, would have only thought how honorable to Ruth it would be to marry Boaz. Others, again, would have thought of his wealth, and how Ruth, by marrying him, would procure a home, which neither she nor Naomi now had. Others, still, will say that Naomi, having reason to believe that if the plan she was agitating should succeed, it would, in the end, be the means of furnishing herself with a permanent home, as well as Ruth, was not a little selfish. *I* do not see any evidence, however, that she was selfish at all in this matter, or that she even so much as thought of herself; though it is of course impossible to tell with certainty what passed in her mind.

All this provision and forethought

about the future, I mean so far as the welfare of Ruth was concerned, was perfectly right and commendable. No wise parent would indeed ever advise a daughter to marry a rich man solely because he was rich; for this would be decidedly wrong. But if the character of the individual is what it should be in every other respect, riches in addition are no objection, but rather an advantage. And I do not think it would have been at all improper for Naomi, who knew that Boaz was not only wealthy, but liberal, and charitable, and excellent, to have taken every circumstance into consideration. Had he been a miser, the case would have been altered most materially.

The grand reason, as I have already intimated, why people ought, as a general rule, to marry, is because God has made it our duty. He has said in his Word, that "it is not good for man to be alone;" and has accordingly so ordered things, that the same or nearly the same number of females as of males are born in every country. Does not this

show very plainly both the impropriety of having more than one wife (polygamy) and of celibacy ?

But God has not left us without an indication of our duty, on this subject. He has laid a foundation in our very natures, for an attachment to each other from early youth, and sometimes even from infancy. This may often be seen in the choice which children make of toys. A gentleman who kept and sold sugar toys for many years, and in whom I place entire confidence, had, among other things, figures of girls and boys, and he assures me that little boys, almost without exception, preferred the sugar girls, and little girls the sugar boys. I do not say that this proves anything; but I believe it to be a fact; and if so, it is a curious one. And whether it is a fact or not, it is certainly true that it is natural for us to form attachments very early; and that God, when he made us, meant to have it so. All he asks of us is, that these attachments should be formed and conducted accord-

ing to the principles which are laid down in the Bible.

And here it is easy to suppose, that when Naomi first began to talk to Ruth on the subject of a second marriage, conversation not unlike the following, in its spirit, took place between them.

Naomi. Do you never think, my daughter, of a second marriage?

Ruth. Yes; I have sometimes thought of the subject, when others have first suggested it to me; but not often.

N. But do you not think marriage a duty?

R. I have been taught to regard it as entirely a matter of choice and inclination. If two persons happen to be mutually attached to each other, and there are no serious obstacles in the way of a union, I have supposed it might be well enough to marry.

N. A mutual attachment ought to exist, most undoubtedly. Still, we, the Jewish nation, view the matter as a duty to God. We believe that the command in the twenty-eighth verse of the

first chapter of Genesis, means just what it says; and that if parents do not exert themselves to have their children, in their turn, become also the heads of families, they not only neglect to do every thing they can to promote the glory of God, but actually commit a heinous crime. We have, indeed, no name for it, but it is really a *crime*; at least, we have always believed it to be so. We often engage our daughters while they are yet very young; but after they are twenty years of age, no father is held guiltless, if he neglects to do all in his power to provide them with suitable companions. And now, that you have no other parent or guardian but myself, it becomes my duty to converse with you on this subject, and thus, for the time, take the place of a father.

R. I am much obliged to you, my dear mother, for all your kindness, and for the deep interest you take in my welfare; but you seem to forget that I have been once married.

N. By no means. But this does not

materially alter the case. You know that neither of my sons, Mahlon or Chilion, left any family; and as Boaz, our only kinsman, has no children, our family name is likely to become extinct. Now such an event would be a calamity as well as a reproach to us; and it becomes my duty, as a parent, to do all in my power to prevent it.

But to dissuade you from overlooking this great duty to God, I have other considerations to present to you.

Every young person needs care, and guidance, and counsel. For this purpose, God has provided us with parents.

But as we grow up to mature years, these guides may be taken away from us by death, or otherwise; or if they live, we may remove from them. Or if we remain together under the same roof, they cease to have the same influence over us that they had while we were young. They expect us, the older children, to govern, and direct, and restrain ourselves, at least in some measure. And it happens, usually, that we are quite as willing to do this as they are

willing to have us; nay, much more so. Many young persons, indeed, of both sexes, especially boys, rejoice to get away from parental restraint; for authority becomes irksome to them. Yet, strange as the fact may seem, at this very period of life, when parents and masters think it necessary to leave us to act for ourselves, and when we the children are often so glad to get rid of all authority, and become our own masters and teachers; this very period is that in which, above all, we need direction, advice and restraint.

R. I can hardly view the matter in this light, my dear mother. Would it not be to charge the Creator with imperfection in his arrangements for our happiness? For certainly it must be a part of his plan that parents and children, as the latter grow older, should be less closely connected or bound together.

N. I will remove the difficulty which you feel, in a moment. I was going on to say, that at this very period—the stormy period of life, as it is often called;

when others cease to restrain us as formerly, and our passions, some of them new and powerful, are strong, and unless duly curbed, almost irresistible; just at this very period of life, there arises, usually, if it ever arise, that soft and tender attachment to the other sex, which, if directed to an individual of great worth, has an immense influence over us; not merely when the object of our attachment is before us, but when islands and seas have separated us. The sea-faring man, even in Tarshish, or the other distant ports of the great western sea, when tempted to improprieties of conduct, remembers the object of his affection at home, and if the fear of God has no place in his bosom, a regard to her often has. He says to himself; “What would she think of me, if she were present, and saw me yielding to this temptation?”—and with this thought, he turns aside his feet from the slippery paths he was about to enter. And the thought of what our absent friends would think of *us*, has scarcely

less influence on the conduct of our own sex, in similar circumstances.

Here, then, comes in something to take the place of parental care; and it comes precisely at the period, too (say between the ages of fifteen and twenty), when it is most needed. It is a restraint which, being continued for several years, till we are of a proper age to marry, saves many a young person's character from being shipwrecked. You see, therefore, in this arrangement, a new proof of the goodness of God, instead of an impeachment of that goodness.

R. I do, indeed; and with a clearness with which I never saw it before. Still, I do not see how your remarks can be made to apply to *my* case. They seem intended for those who are younger, and have never been married.

N. Then hear me a little longer, my daughter. If our affection is genuine, and we do not mistake each other's character, this influence is not only continued through many long years before

marriage, but also after that period. We still need somebody to restrain us; for we are still liable, in one way or another, to fall into mistakes and errors, and even into gross sins.

But I had forgotten one thing. While forming an acquaintance, and learning each other's characters, during the years that precede marriage, we may do much for each other in the way of direct advice, counsel and caution. This is the more needed in proportion as our parents have ceased to afford it. It may moreover, be done far better in this way than parents could do it. As we cannot see our own defects so well as others, so it often happens that parents are blind to defects in their children—their second selves. But an intimate friend, of the other sex, will discover all these things which the parent either overlooks, or cannot see; and if a *true* friend, will labor to correct them.

Now this restraint, and these efforts at correction, will both be needed after marriage; nay, they will be needed

more or less through life. We shall always have defects in manners or conduct that will need correction, as long as we live. And happy are they whose companions of the other sex are able and willing to correct them. You see, therefore, my daughter, the importance of a husband. You know, from experience, that what I have said of his influence at setting out in life is true; now the object which I principally aim at, at present, is, to convince you that the same advantages which you derived from being associated a few years with my son, are still desirable to you during the remainder of your life.

R. Surely you do not mean to say that I need the advice, and counsel, and aid, of which you speak, as much as I did when I first became acquainted with Mahlon!

N. By no means. On the contrary, your character has been greatly improved by living with him only a few years. But it still needs—as is the case with every one—improvement; and will

need it as long as you live. It is a sad mistake of the young, to think that their minds and souls come to perfection as early as their bodies, and cannot grow better any longer than those. The mind and heart should grow better through life; and marriage is the best school in the world in which to accomplish this purpose.

R. But I have *your* society and excellent counsel, my dear mother; will not this be sufficient?

N. You will be welcome, as you have hitherto been, to the little I can do for you. But remember I shall not last always. The infirmities of age, hastened by severe trials, are already creeping fast upon me; and I must, at best, soon go down to the grave. Additional counsel and support, especially in a land of strangers, would be valuable to you, even while I am alive and able to assist you. But what will you do when I am gone?—I do not ask what you will do for food, and raiment, and shelter; for our God, who is good, and

who has favorably disposed the hearts of the people of Bethlehem towards you, and who, in fact, never forsakes them that do not first forsake him, will provide for you in this respect. Still, the means of subsistence for the future, is a matter worth your consideration; as it is not pleasant to be wholly dependent on others. But to what bosom friend will you go, after I am laid low in the grave, to communicate your sorrows and your joys; and to seek counsel and sympathy?

R. There is certainly weight in what you say, my dear mother; and though I value your society at present more than any other, I will submit the matter to you. I will not wholly turn a deaf ear to any thing which you may propose; relying, as I do, on your kindness, as well as goodness of heart; and firmly believing that you will advise me to no measures which are not worthy of my consideration, and in accordance with the customs and usages of this my adopted country.

CHAP. XII.

Naomi's Advice.

THE nearest relative to Ruth's former husband that Naomi knew, seems to have been Boaz, in whose fields she had labored during harvest. He was a very worthy man, though now rather old. Whether he had ever been married or not, the Scripture does not say; but if he had, he must have lost his wife; and it does not appear, as we have already seen, that he had any sons or daughters. If he had ever thought of proposing to marry Ruth, it is most likely there were so many difficulties in the way, that it seemed to him almost, if not quite, impracticable. Perhaps her poverty was one of the difficulties. Another might have been her origin—in the land of Moab. Another still might have been the great difference of their age.* Naomi, however, seemed bent

* A still stronger reason, perhaps, for his making no proposals was, that there was another friend more nearly related.

upon effecting an alliance. She appeared to regard Ruth as having a claim upon Boaz. So she consulted with her on the subject, and proposed that she should solicit his hand.

Ruth, who knew, as I have already said, very little of the customs and usages of the country she was in, and had perfect confidence in her mother, hearkened to her suggestions, and concluded to follow her advice. She would not, it is true, have ever proposed such a plan herself, or perhaps ever thought of it; but now that her mother proposed it, and gave so many weighty reasons in favor of it, she was willing to hearken to what she supposed to be alike her duty to God, to her mother-in-law, and to herself.

Boaz, it seems, was at this time winnowing his barley in the field where it grew, as was the custom of the country. He had a temporary threshing floor erected for the purpose; and was provided with all necessary entertainments for himself and his workmen; as well

as conveniences for lodging there. It appears, moreover, that he used sometimes to lodge there himself; and that Naomi knew it.

Her proposal to Ruth was as follows: "Wash thyself, and anoint thee, and put thy raiment upon thee, and get thee down to the floor; but make not thyself known unto the man, until he shall have done eating and drinking. And it shall be, when he lieth down, that thou shalt mark the place where he shall lie, and thou shalt go in and uncover his feet, and lay thee down; and he will tell thee what thou shalt do."

Here is no direction that she should ask Boaz, in so many words, to become her husband; but it is plainly implied; and from the manner in which Ruth performed the errand, there can be no doubt that it was a part of Naomi's directions.

I might stop here to speak of the customs which prevailed among the Jews at this time, as made known in these very directions of Naomi. I might

speak of the high value which they put upon frequent washing and changing their raiment—things of the greatest importance to health now-a-days, and in the United States, as well as among the Israelites of three or four thousand years ago. Their practice of anointing themselves, too, I might speak of; but I do not think this a practice worth imitating. I might also speak of their beds, which were much more simple, though not less conducive to health, than ours; and of the early hour at which they retired to rest. Lastly, I might, in passing, inquire whether the Israelites, at that time, ever wore masks. For though I have never heard that they did, how did Ruth contrive to be present at the threshing floor, at supper time, without being known by Boaz?

The truth, however, probably is, that by making herself known, is meant *making her errand known*. So Henry thinks in his Commentary; and such seems to me the most easy explanation of the matter. It is not easy to believe

that she could have been present at any part of the feast, without being known to the reapers and to Boaz. But she could easily avoid making known her errand till the appropriate time. But I will not break in upon my story longer, to attend, now, to these less important circumstances.

The customs of countries differ so much—and, indeed, the customs of the same country at different periods of its history—that it is next to impossible to say what things are or are not improper, in all situations, and under all circumstances. We should think, at first view, that though there might not be any thing improper in Ruth's claiming Boaz for a husband, and in doing so at the threshing floor, instead of his own house, yet the *manner* was very strange. The answer, however, of Ruth to her mother; "All that thou sayest unto me I will do," sets the matter at rest, so far as Ruth was concerned; for she would never have assented to any thing which she knew had the slightest ap-

pearance of evil. The only fault I am inclined to find is with Naomi. But her anxiety on behalf of Ruth was so great, and she had such entire confidence both in her and Boaz, and so different were things then, from what we find them now, that I am, on the whole, satisfied she, too, *intended* well. And as she thought no evil, so no evil happened, except in appearance; and her confidence in the good character of both Ruth and Boaz proved to be well founded.

CHAP. XIII.

Ruth's Visit to Boaz:

RUTH, having made every proper preparation for her singular, yet well-meant visit, immediately proceeded to the threshing floor of Boaz, in the fields near Bethlehem. She needed no person to direct her to the place—for she

had gleaned in the fields too often, not to know the way.

It appears to have been customary among the Jews then, to have a sort of feast when they had finished winnowing their grain, to which the reapers and perhaps the gleaners were invited. Some are quite of the opinion that, on this occasion, Ruth was invited among the rest. They had feasts, also, on other occasions, as at sheep shearing.

Boaz having finished his winnowing at his threshing floor, and prepared his entertainment, sat down himself with his workmen. He must have been, I think, a good farmer;—he certainly acted like one. He was often present with his laborers while they were winnowing his grain; not that he was afraid he should lose any of it by their fraud, perhaps; but to prevent carelessness and waste. Laborers or servants who are perfectly honest, may not always be profitable to their employers and masters. Many are thoughtless and heedless, and some are imprudent.

Another object Boaz might have had in view, by being so much in the fields with his men, viz., to gain their affection and good will; perhaps to give them good instruction.

There is too much distance kept up between the rich and the poor. The latter, from their ignorance of the actual condition of the former, suppose that their enjoyments are as much greater than their own as their property is larger; and hence they are inclined both to envy them, and to covet their wealth. No mistake can be greater than this, and no consequences more deplorable. And the consequences to which I refer, are becoming worse and worse, every day.

Happy would it be for both parties, and for the world generally, if this mistake could be rectified; and if the poor could understand that the rich, with all their property, have much less of actual enjoyment than themselves. One thing which would do much towards enlightening them on this subject, would

be for them to invite each other to their tables respectively ; and encourage and maintain more freedom of intercourse.

This object, among many others, *might* be in part accomplished by the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, in churches, as it is *usually* administered and received; though I am extremely sorry to say that distinctions do creep in, even here. It should not be so. All who partake of the privileges of this blessed ordinance, ought to feel that they are entirely on a level ;—are all servants ;—and servants to the same master, even Christ. The time will come, I think, when this ordinance will have among others, this happy effect ;—an effect which HE who instituted it most undoubtedly intended.

We have already seen that Boaz, mighty and wealthy as he was, was familiar with his servants and workmen, and that he ate and drank with them. Some suppose that the Scripture language that he ate and drank at the feast which he gave on the present occasion,

and that his heart was *merry*, implies that he drank some stimulating liquor or other, and was slightly intoxicated; but I do not think so. It only means that he ate and drank till he was refreshed—felt well—which is the proper way to eat; and in general the only proper way. We are not told that he ate and drank till he made himself like a beast, or was sick; nor do I believe that he did. It is even said in the Chaldee paraphrase, that he did not go to bed without prayer: “He blessed the name of the Lord who had heard his prayers, and taken away the famine from the land of Israel.”

Boaz's bed or couch was at the end of the pile of grain of which they had just completed the winnowing. Distinguished and wealthy as he was, he could not only partake of an entertainment at the threshing floor with his workmen, but also lodge there. He retired to rest very early, as was his practice.

When he was fast asleep, Ruth, at-

tentive to her mother's orders, went softly to the place, and lay down at his feet. She took the place of a suppliant—one who had favor to ask of a superior—and not the place of an intimate friend. In those days, people were accustomed to bow down at the feet of those whom they deemed greater or more honorable than themselves, or of whom they are about to ask alms or favors. Thus Ruth, in a modest, humble manner, laid herself at the feet of Boaz.

Boaz, having had one good nap—for, as I said before, he went to bed early—awoke late in the evening, and, to his great surprise, found that somebody lay across at his feet. He immediately asked who was there. Ruth answered, and told him her name; and explained, with the utmost simplicity and plainness, her object in coming there. She seemed to say, Thou art he that has a right, according to the Jewish law, to redeem a poor, scattered, but respectable family, as well as an estate from

perishing ; and I have come to solicit thee to do so. Let, therefore, thy care be over me, and graciously interest thyself in our behalf, and espouse me and my cause.

Boaz knew the character of Ruth, and the justice and reasonableness of her claim too well, to find any fault, either with that, or her manner of preferring it. He treated her with all the attention, and respect, and kindness that he would have done a daughter ; for, as he had usually done, he called her his “daughter,” and invoked a blessing on her from the Lord. He said, “Blessed be thou of the Lord, my daughter ; for thou hast showed more kindness in the latter end than at the beginning ; inasmuch as thou followedst not young men, whether poor or rich.”

He seems to have supposed—so it appears to some—that she might have been solicitous to gain his favor and affection from the very first of her coming into his fields and following his

reapers ; though, for my own part, I do not think it was the case. Probably perseverance in her suit, thus manifested, had no little influence over his mind, and was one cause of his deciding the matter as he did.

Who could avoid being interested in such a person ? She had left her native land, and all her friends and acquaintances, with whom she was born and educated ; and for the love she bore to her mother-in-law, and to the God whom the latter worshiped, had gone to spend her days with her in a strange land ; and not to live with her family exactly, but rather to take her under her own care, and support and comfort her in the evening of her days. It is true, she was not so far from her native land but that she might have thought of returning. But that she did not, appears most clearly from her soliciting the hand of Boaz in marriage. And it adds not a little to the great weight of evidence in favor of her excellent character, that, as Boaz remark-

ed, she sought not the society and the hand of a young man ; for youthful, and beautiful, and reputable, and becoming so generally known as she was at Bethlehem, she could not but have succeeded in such an attempt—but in accordance with the wishes of her mother, and out of respect to the family and the law of God, she chose to marry a man much older than herself, and as some would undoubtedly say, neither a proper nor a suitable companion. Not that she was wholly without affection for him ; for though *respect* to her mother and the law of God were very strong motives with her, it seems most likely that his excellence of conduct and character had made an impression in his favor upon her heart.

Boaz assured Ruth that he entirely approved of the course she had taken, and begged her to let her mind be at rest upon the subject. It was true, he said, that there was a nearer relation of the family than he—a fact which neither Naomi nor Ruth appears to have

known—but that if this other relation should refuse to perform the duty of redeeming the property and marrying her, he would do it. He not only stated all this to her very explicitly, but as was the custom of his nation, confirmed it with an oath. “As the Lord liveth,” said he, “I will do as I have promised.” He then requested her to compose herself, and rest again, at his feet, until morning.

There is one thing more to be noticed in this place. Boaz was truly a *polite* man. He would not send her away in the night, nor would he so much as disturb or agitate her mind with any doubts whether her conduct would appear well or not. He simply did all he could to put her mind at ease in regard to the future. Instead of leaving her to suppose, or perhaps to fear, that she might be obliged to go in person to the other relative, and make her claim on him, as she had done on Boaz, he left the impression on her mind, no doubt, that he would attend

to the matter himself. I judge that this was the fact, both from his words and from his general character.

Early in the morning, before it was light enough to distinguish one person from another, Ruth rose, and prepared to return. She would probably have returned the evening before, as soon as she had finished her errand, but for two reasons. She did not wish to be seen walking abroad so late in the evening; and, besides, Boaz had insisted on her staying. But now that day was dawning, it was time for her to go.

Before she went, Boaz prepared a present for her mother. It consisted of six measures of barley; but how much this was, precisely, cannot now be ascertained.* She carried it home in her mantle or apron—the Bible says *vail*; but the meaning is as I have represented—and it was probably as much as she could conveniently carry. It is

* Some suppose it was six omers, which would have been something more than a half bushel.

said that Boaz laid it on her ; but we are not told whether she carried the parcel on her head or her shoulders.

CHAP. XIV.

Ruth's Return to her Mother.

WHILE it was yet early in the morning, Ruth returned to the city to her mother; but not till Boaz had enjoined it on her to keep the interview a profound secret. Not that any thing had occurred which he was unwilling should be known ; but there are, in every community, persons who will not wait to know the whole history of an affair, but if any thing appears uncommon or strange, especially if it seems to be against the reputation of a neighbor or a fellow-citizen, will go and report it, as soon as they get wind of it, and as they relate only one part of it, perhaps make difficulty. By Ruth's going home early,

and avoiding observation, this evil would probably be prevented.

It is indeed true, that we should avoid even the *appearance* of evil; and as I have said before, I cannot entirely acquit Naomi of being imprudent in this matter; though Ruth, in every thing she did, conducted with discretion. But I think Naomi must have suffered the punishment of her imprudence; and I will tell you how.

There is nothing said which would lead us to believe that Naomi expected Ruth would stay all night. For any thing which appears, she might have expected her at home, by ten o'clock. As she did not arrive, what must have been her feelings? What her conflict between hope and fear?

I have known a parent rendered almost distracted by his son's staying from home all night, when he did not expect it. This young man, whose name was William, went to an adjoining town with one of his companions, on a certain day, to visit some friends. They

set out early in the morning, and though they might not have been told to return that night, in so many words, yet this was the father's expectation; and William knew it.

As it drew near evening, William prepared to return. His companion was ready, but the friends immediately began to press them to remain till morning. William refused stoutly, but the other consented. At last the entreaties of the company prevailed, and William concluded to stay too.

It was early in the spring, when floods were frequent, and the road by which they came, lay, for several miles, by the side of a river which was known to be quite subject to inundations. When the usual hour for retiring to rest arrived, William's father, who had before begun to be uneasy, now became greatly distressed. He sat up and walked the room for a long time; and when he lay down, he could not sleep. His son—his dear son—he fancied must be drowned in the river; and if at any mo-

ment sleep began to steal upon his senses, he was immediately aroused to a sense of his misery, by imagining the struggles and cries of his drowning son! The son, however, returned the next day in safety.

I have related this story to show, feebly—for the whole cannot be known except to those who have felt the anguish themselves—how much our parents sometimes undergo on our behalf; and how much Naomi might have undergone in the absence of Ruth. I do not think she slept much. How could she, under such circumstances? Not that life was at stake, or property. Oh no. But reputation is dearer than life, and virtue than property.

The injunction of Boaz, that the whole matter should be kept a secret, must, it seems to me, have set Ruth also to thinking. For though one principal reason for this injunction may have been the fear that a false report might produce unjust and incorrect impressions on the mind of the other near rel-

ative of Ruth, which would defeat his own plan, yet in addition to all this, conscience must have whispered to Ruth, as she tripped lightly across the fields to Bethlehem, that all was not exactly as it should have been; in spite of the integrity of Boaz and herself, and the kindness of Naomi.

But be this as it may have been, she soon came to Naomi, who received her with great joy, and at once inquired what her success had been. Ruth gave her a true and full account of every thing that had happened. She did not keep back some things from her mother, lest she might not approve of them, as many daughters do. She told her all; that if any thing was wrong in her conduct, Naomi might set it right. She brought to her mother, also, the present of barley Boaz had sent her.

Nothing would have been more natural with some daughters, had they been in the place of Ruth, than to *reflect* a little on their mother for sending them in the way she did. Naomi, too, might

have blamed Ruth for staying all night. But not a word of the kind, so far as we can learn from the Bible, ever passed between them. In their anxiety about the future, each probably overlooked or forgot the past.

Let me break from my narrative, a few moments, to dwell on a very popular, but highly pernicious error.

Perhaps nothing does more to degrade and lower this blessed institution of the great Creator,—I mean marriage,—than the very common practice with the young, in some parts of our country, of giving and receiving visits in the evening, and continuing them late at night. A stranger from the moon, or from one of the planets, on finding that we visit and converse with our friends whom we love, especially about marriage, *in the night*, might very naturally ask if marriage was reckoned disgraceful among us.

It would be well if the practice of making visits of this kind in the afternoon only, which is now beginning to

prevail in some places, were in fashion every where. It would do immense good. I have already expressed, indirectly, my strong dislike of making visits of the kind referred to, on Sabbath evening; but I should rejoice if it was prohibited every evening. But whether they are made in the afternoon, or at any other time, they should be discontinued so early that the parties may return home and retire at their usual hour.

It is far more pleasant to see our young friends maturing their acquaintance in the light of day, and perhaps walking abroad to enjoy the beauty and melody of nature, than to see them sitting in heated rooms, enlightened only by smoking lamps, or dim tapers; excluded from pure air, and the cheerful influence of the world around. Night is the time for repose. There are fewer objections, it is true, to sitting a few hours, in the long winter evenings, in a large social circle, than to sitting almost *solitary*. Still, whether the company

consist of two, or ten, or fifty persons, they ought to disperse at least by nine o'clock, at any season.

I shall, of course, object to large parties assembled in the evening for dancing or other public amusements. As Christians,—as children of the day,—it seems to me far better to avoid every thing of the kind.

But to resume our narrative. I have said that Naomi received her daughter with great joy. She did so: nor was this all. She advised Ruth to do nothing more herself; but to wait patiently the issue of events; for Boaz would settle the whole matter before he rested that night. She knew very well the character of Boaz; that when he had begun a matter, he was never perfectly easy till he finished it. Perhaps, too, she believed him to be so strongly attached to Ruth, that he would not be contented till the matter was settled, even if it were solely on his own account.

Persons who, having begun a piece

of work, are not easy till it is finished, have sometimes been ridiculed as having the "lust of finishing." Now I am ready to admit that there *may* be an improper, and unreasonable, and even an unchristian anxiety of this kind; and no doubt there sometimes is. But no person will ever be of much use in this world, nor, as we may presume, in any other, who has not a good share of this disposition to finish what he has once begun. If we have begun a wrong thing, or begun a right thing in a wrong manner, there is no reason for continuing in the wrong. But he who begins, and does not exert himself, so far as health and circumstances permit, with a view to finish at the time originally contemplated, unless there is some strong reason for altering his original intention, commits a great error; and such a person will seldom succeed well, either in the cause of God or the world. I am always charmed with this trait in the character of Boaz; and we see, in the case of Naomi, what confidence

it enabled her to put in him. We see, too, that her confidence was not misplaced.

CHAP. XV.

How Boaz Proceeded.

Boaz was evidently one of the elders of the city of Bethlehem, perhaps what we should call an alderman. Indeed, it is not quite certain that he was not the chief magistrate, or mayor. "What! the mayor go out among his reapers," you will say, "and winnow barley with them, and eat and drink with them, both in the field and at the threshing floor?" Yes, all of these. It was not in those days as it often is now. A man who sat as judge in the gate of a city was not supposed to lower himself at all by being a plain man, or even by sleeping by a pile of grain.

These foolish notions had not, at that time, come into fashion.

But whether Boaz was mayor, or only an alderman of the city, he had power to call a court, even though it was not court day. This he did on the present occasion. He went to the town hall, over the city gate, where public business was usually transacted, and having collected ten of the city elders, proceeded to submit to them the cause.

The great integrity of Boaz is shown in a most striking manner, by this very transaction. He might have said, "My money is as good as that of any other man;" and so have gone and redeemed the estate, and married Ruth, to whom he was now evidently attached, without saying one word about it to his kinsman or any body else, except Ruth and Naomi. But fond as he was of Ruth, and desirous as (for her sake) he might now have been of the purchase, he was above doing any thing that might be considered mean, or in the least degree

unfair or dishonorable. He was willing every thing he did should see the light. He had no wish to conceal any thing. It was a maxim with him, and a good one, too,—that “Honesty is the best policy.” And though a judge himself, he would not decide his own cause, at least without the evidence and concurrence of others ; but chose to call a court,* summon to it his rival, the other relative of Naomi and Ruth, and get an expression of their opinion.

It happened that this man came along just as the court was called ; so he was summoned in. Boaz then, in the presence of the ten elders, thus addressed him :—“Naomi,” said he, “that is come again out of the country of Moab, selleth a parcel of land that was our

* The assembling together of these ten elders in such a way, and the peculiar character of the transactions that followed, hardly justify our calling this meeting a regular court ; though it is called so by commentators. It was rather the calling together a number of witnesses to an important transaction or ceremony.

brother Elimelech's ; and I thought to advertise thee, saying, Buy it before the inhabitants, and before the elders of my people. If thou wilt redeem it, redeem it ; but if thou wilt not redeem it, then tell me, that I may know ; for there is none to redeem it beside thee, and I am after thee."

The man, quite anxious to get hold of the property, and thinking, probably, that as Naomi was a widow and greatly impoverished, he should get it low, said he would redeem it. It is probable that it was a valuable piece of property, and was so situated that it would have accommodated him.

Upon this, Boaz told him that there was a condition connected with the purchase of the land, which he would also be obliged to comply with ; which was, that in buying the land, he must take with it Ruth the Moabitess.

Whether the man had a family already, or whether it was that Ruth came from a strange country, and was poor, and lived by her hard labor and

the charity of others, or whatever might have been the cause, the name of Ruth was no sooner mentioned than he fell back from the bargain. Rather than buy the land with such an incumbrance, he chose not to buy it at all.

This was precisely what Boaz wanted. There was nothing now in his way to the possession both of Ruth and the property. The only thing that remained now, was to finish and bind the bargain.

A curious custom prevailed in Judea in those days. It was not usual to pass or change estates or property of any kind by writings; but the bargain was made public and binding on the parties by some sign or ceremony. There was once in England a ceremony a little like it in regard to the *delivery* of property. When it was a house, the seller or deliverer gave a key; when a piece of land, a turf or a twig. Even in some of the States of this Union, a verbal contract, where the transfer of property is concerned, is not binding, unless

something is given by the purchaser to the seller, if it is nothing more than a penknife. In Judea, he that *surrendered, sold, or gave up* the property, “plucked off his shoe,” (or as some have it, his glove), and gave it to the purchaser or new owner. This ceremony was by no means an idle one; for it had a very important meaning to it, which was, that whatever right he previously had to tread or go upon the land, he hereby transferred it to another person; and this was “a testimony in Israel.” This custom the kinsman of Boaz now cheerfully complied with, before the ten elders. He drew off his shoe, and presented it to Boaz.

Had this kinsman been a brother of Mahlon, Ruth's former husband, and had he then refused to redeem the land, and marry her, according to law, Ruth would have been obliged, as we may see by the ninth verse of the twenty-fifth chapter of Deuteronomy, to have plucked off his shoe herself, and to have “spit in his face,” or *before* his face.

But he was evidently a more distant relation than a brother ; and this precluded any such necessity.

CHAP. XVI.

Boaz and Ruth Married.

MARRIAGE, one of the earliest institutions of the great Creator, is celebrated very differently in different ages and countries. With Catholic Christians, it is regarded as one of the sacred rites of the church. With Protestants, though not admitted to the rank of a church ordinance, it is yet, for the most part, regarded as a religious rite ; and is accompanied, in its celebration, by prayer and other religious ceremonies. There are, however, some Protestant and other countries in which marriage is regarded as a mere bargain—a contract;—and though an important one, little more

sacred than the buying of a house or a piece of land.

There is one point of view in which all contracts, and indeed every thing we do, is sacred. An apostle has taught us that "whether we eat or drink, or WHATSOEVER WE DO, we should do all to the glory of God." In fact, this is only embodying in a few words, what the Savior of mankind taught diligently, both by example and precept, for years together. There is nothing worth doing, however small and apparently unworthy of the great Creator's notice, but what may and should be done to his glory; that is, precisely as he would have it done.

The school boy, at the day school, may think, when at his plays, or at his studies, that God takes no notice of him; or if he sees him, pays little regard to what he does, and cares still less *how* he does it; the pupils of the Sabbath school may think that God will never bring them into judgment for things

which they do on the Sabbath, in going or returning from church or school, or when no human eye sees them; but only while they are at the church, or in the class; the young mechanic or farmer may think that when he is planing boards, or shingling houses, or making coats, hats, or shoes, or ploughing or hoeing the soil, God pays no regard to it, nor is solicitous how or with what motive he does it; and that it is only at church, or lecture, or funeral, or at morning and evening devotions, or in the closet, that he requires every thing to be done in a holy and heavenly manner; but it is a most sad mistake to think so. There is not one of these things—nor indeed any thing that it is proper to do at all, but what we are required to do exactly in such a manner that God will be pleased with it: in other words, so that it will best promote his glory in the universal good of his creatures.

Marriage, it is true, is of a character somewhat different from ordinary occu-

pations; because it is usually the beginning of a life of greater usefulness to both parties concerned, if properly considered, and duly improved; but the beginning, on the contrary, of a course of strife, contention, and woe, if its important intentions are disregarded, or if it is entered into thoughtlessly.

Among the Jews, the parties destined to marriage were, as I have already shown, usually betrothed or engaged very early, sometimes before the young lady was twelve years of age; but they were not allowed to marry before, at least, twelve and a half years.

The manner of demanding a daughter in marriage, was singular. This may be seen in the case of Eliezer, when he demanded Rebekah for Isaac. The husband gave a dowry to his wife as a kind of purchase money; and the amount which he should give was agreed on before the finishing of the contract. Jacob, who had no other dowry to offer for his two wives, the daughters of La-

ban, gave seven years of hard work for each of them.

There were several ways of engaging to marry. One was performed by writing; and nearly in the following words:

“On such a day of such a month, in such a year, N., the son of N., has said to S., the daughter of H., Be thou my spouse according to the law of Moses and the Israelites, and I will give thee for thy portion the sum of two hundred zuzim, as is ordained by the law. And the said S. has consented to become his spouse on these conditions, which the said N. has promised to perform on the day of marriage. To this the said N. obliges himself; and for this he engages all his goods, even as far as the cloak that he wears upon his shoulder. Moreover, he promises to perform all that is generally intended in contracts of marriage in favor of the Israelitish women. Witnesses, L., B., and R.”

Another method of promising to marry, was made by a piece of silver given to the bride before witnesses;

when the young man said to his mistress, "Receive this piece of silver as a pledge that you shall become my spouse."

After the marriage was agreed upon, the young people had the liberty of seeing each other, which was not usually allowed to them before. Between the time of the engagement and the marriage, considerable time often elapsed; sometimes because one or both the parties was under the proper age, and sometimes for different reasons. When the parties were agreed on the terms of marriage, and the time was come for completing it, they drew up the contract.

We learn by the gospel according to John, that the bridegroom had a bride-man; called by our Savior the friend of the bridegroom. A number of young people kept company with the bridegroom during all the days of the wedding, to do him honor; and a number of young women with the bride also, in a separate apartment. On the evening

before the wedding, the friends and companions of the bride sung the Epithalamium, or wedding song, at the door of the bride's room. The forty-fifth Psalm is an Epithalamium.

The wedding ceremonies of the Jews were performed with very great propriety. The young gentlemen and ladies were not only in separate apartments, but ate at different tables. The young men, as in the case of Samson, sometimes diverted themselves with proposing riddles, and the bridegroom appointed a prize to those who could explain them.

The marriage ceremonies usually lasted, in the case of a young lady, seven days; in the case of a widow three. Thus Laban said to Jacob, respecting Leah, "Fulfil her week." The ceremonies of Samson's wedding, as we also know, continued seven whole days. These seven days of rejoicing were commonly spent in the house of the woman's father; after which they conducted the bride to her husband's home.

It is said that the modern Jews, in some countries, throw handfuls of wheat on the newly married couple, at the same time wishing them prosperity; and that in other countries they mix small pieces of money with the wheat, which the poorer people gather up.

The procession which accompanied the bride to the house of her husband on these occasions, was usually one of great pomp; though this was in proportion, no doubt, to the pecuniary circumstances of the bridegroom. The hour selected was often the night. This will explain the fact that in the beautiful parable of our Savior, in the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew, the scene is laid in the night. The ten virgins were represented as asleep, and when the midnight cry, that the bridegroom was coming, aroused them, the five who had been wise and prepared their lamps with oil, went out to meet him; while the other five, who from indolence had neglected to provide it, went forth to buy some; and while they were gone,

the procession passed by. Those who foresaw, and prepared themselves, went in with the procession, it seems, to the nuptial entertainment; but the others, being tardy, were shut out.

As Ruth was a widow, and Boaz an old man, if not a widower, as the circumstances of their engagement were all very peculiar, and as the Bible gives us so little information on the subject, it is rather difficult to conjecture how far the customary ceremonies were complied with at their marriage. Of one thing we are certain, which is, that the contract of the marriage was finished by Boaz himself, before the ten elders; and perhaps even before his kinsman left the hall. It appears that, by this time, other persons had come in besides the ten elders, for Boaz is said to have proclaimed his marriage contract not only before the elders, but before *all the people*. The Bible language is as follows:

“And Boaz said unto the elders, and unto all the people; Ye are witnesses

this day that I have bought all that was Elimelech's, and all that was Chilion's and Mahlon's, of the hand of Naomi. Moreover, Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon, have I purchased to be my wife, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance, that the name of the dead be not cut off from among his brethren, and from the gate of his place: ye are witnesses this day." And all the people that were in the gate, and the elders said, "We are witnesses."

By making this public declaration of his marriage and purchase, Boaz not only secured his title against all pretenders, but honored Ruth, by showing that, though she was a Moabitess, and poor, he was not ashamed of her; and also left a public testimony—and one that would be likely to have influence—against clandestine marriages.

At what time, during these remarkable transactions in the town hall, Ruth was brought in, does not appear; but it seems she was present at the close of the proclamation; for after the elders

and all the people who witnessed the transaction, came to wish them well, pray for their prosperity, and bless them, they spake so plainly of Ruth, as being present, that it is next to impossible, I think, to doubt the fact. It is by no means improbable that most of the marriage ceremonies customary on similar occasions, where one, at least, of the parties had been married before, were celebrated before they left the hall. What confirms me in this opinion, is, the mention made that Boaz, on leaving the hall, took her to his house; by which the best commentators seem to understand that he took her thither with the usual "solemnities;" among which was the procession already described, and the subsequent nuptial entertainment.

CHAP. XVII.

The Conclusion.

WE are now drawing towards the close of this singular but instructive story. Ruth had now become the wife and mistress of the house and wealth of Boaz; not excepting the fields in which so lately she had gleaned wheat after his reapers.

It might be curious to inquire in this place what became of Naomi. Did Ruth bring her into the splendid establishment of which she had now become the virtuous and worthy mistress and occupant? Or did she remain where she was? How this was, we shall be able to form a better opinion by and by. There is no probability that in any event, Ruth or Boaz would let her suffer.

How different now the condition of Orpah and Ruth! But a short time before, Orpah, no doubt, was pitying poor Ruth, and regretting that she did not succeed in persuading her to accom-

pany her back to the land of Moab, in preference to going into a strange country to spend her days in taking care of her aged mother-in-law. For Orpah, too, loved Naomi, and was rather unwilling to part with her, yet she loved home, and country, and friends, and ease, and luxurious living, and idol worship still better; and now, that she had broken away from her arms, and fairly returned, it is probable she rejoiced at her own condition, and would not, for the world, have exchanged with Ruth.

But if they were so situated as to hear from each other, they must now know how materially altered were their circumstances. Ruth, by her virtue, and piety, and perseverance in well doing, had won the favor and confidence, not only of one good man, but, as it were, of a whole city. She was also in easy circumstances; not only above want, but abundantly able to contribute to the wants of others. She was in a situation, even in a pecuniary

point of view—to say nothing at all of her being in a land where the true God was worshiped—which even the ease-loving Orpah might well envy, were envy in any case allowable.

There is great danger, however, in being thus “raised up out of the dust,” as the Bible expresses it, to be set “with princes.” People are exceedingly apt, in these cases, to become proud and overbearing. It is difficult to believe this of Ruth, however. She had received too many important lessons during many years of painful experience, and great and important changes, not to have become fortified, in some good measure, against the temptations with which she was now surrounded. Besides, her piety was a still better shield than all the rest, against falling into an improper state of feeling.

In process of time, the good Ruth became a mother. Her child was called Obed, which means *a servant*. Naomi was its nurse. It is said she *took* the child; which, to some, may seem to imply that she took it to her own house.

But I cannot well believe that the pious and excellent Ruth and Boaz would suffer their child to go away from its mother to be educated, even by as good and careful a hand as Naomi. The language of the Scripture is, "Naomi took the child, and laid it in her bosom, and became nurse unto it." I think it much the more probable supposition, that she became, from the time of the marriage of Boaz and Ruth, an inmate of their family.

There is an opinion abroad—and indeed it is very common—that grandparents and parents cannot get along well together, especially where there are grandchildren. It is said that they never act in concert and harmony; that, in the education of the little ones, what the parents approve, the grandparents are apt to disapprove; and when the parents form plans, the grandparents are very apt to thwart them.

No doubt this sometimes happens, especially when the grandparents are very old, and have already advanced

into their second childhood. But I think that, even in the latter case, the evils in question—and when they occur, they are certainly great ones—might, in nine cases in ten, be avoided, if the parents and grandparents would talk the matter over kindly and carefully. And unless the latter are greatly incapacitated by age, I think no wise parents would hesitate, in forming plans for the government of their children and their domestics, if they have any, to consult the grandparents, and derive all the wisdom they can from their accumulated experience. I am certain that if this course were taken, if the grandparents not only understood the general plan of the parents, but consented to it, there would seldom be any collision in carrying it out. It does seem to me very great folly for parents to neglect, as many do, to derive that advantage from the experience of *their* parents which they might,—that wisdom which a long life has taught them,

and which could not but be highly advantageous to them in the education of their rising family.

One circumstance makes me hope, sometimes, that Boaz and Ruth took Naomi into their family ; which is, that nothing is said of their having any domestics ; and if they had none, Naomi's aid, in taking care of the child, while Ruth was doing the household work, would have been very valuable. I hope they had too much good sense to collect a host of servants round them ; though, from what we read of the wealthy and great of those days, it is to be feared that they did not dare to resist, so strongly, the current fashion. The silence of the Bible, on this point, proves nothing, I confess ; for the whole story is exceedingly brief ; and after their marriage, the birth of Obed, and the mention of the nurse, it is silent.

I forgot to mention one thing. Soon after the birth of Obed, some persons who were present, congratulated Naomi much more than they did Ruth or

Boaz. Perhaps one reason for doing this was that they considered Naomi as the author, under God, of all the happiness that Boaz and Ruth now enjoyed or were likely to enjoy, because she was the means of their forming the engagement.

No doubt this compliment to Naomi was well intended and well received. But I do not think it any great credit to a person, that he has been the instrument of making a match, however fortunate. For though Boaz and Ruth, without doubt, were very happy together, yet for one such union made up for us by the interference of others which proves happy, ten, I believe, turn out unhappily. And when Naomi was laying her plans, and employing Ruth in carrying them out, there was involved in the measures she took, so far as human calculation can go, independent of Divine influence and direction, a most amazing risk.

That the result was successful, proves nothing in its favor. Who that has

read and admired the story of Joseph, has not shuddered at the abominable cruelty and wickedness of his brethren, in selling him as a slave, and then joining in a falsehood to conceal the crime from their father? Yet this very conduct of theirs led to some of the most wonderful events, in the whole history of the world. Not only did it prove the means of saving Joseph's brethren and friends from starvation, but also of furnishing to the whole Jewish nation, as well as to Egypt, some of the most striking displays of God's power and goodness which were ever recorded. Though Joseph's brethren meant it for evil, God meant it for good; and what God intended it, so it proved.

The same may be said in the present case. Whatever may have been the motives of Elimelech in going to the land of Moab, of Ruth in accompanying her mother to Judea, or of Naomi in getting her settled in life, or whatever we may think of the means she took to accomplish her purposes, God

meant it for good. Indeed, humanly speaking, how could his plans for the final appearance of the Redeemer have been otherwise secured? Christ was to descend, according to the flesh, from David the king. But David was the great-grandson of Boaz and Ruth; and if Ruth had not removed from the land of Moab, and become the wife of Boaz, how could the prophecies have been accomplished, and the Redeemer made manifest?

If some reader should say, This confounds all distinctions between right and wrong; for, at this rate, whatever bad men do must be right;—my answer is, Nobody considers it so; and nobody ever *did*, in *practice*, regard it so. We cannot deny that God meant the sale of Joseph should work out good to the world generally; and yet this did not make it right in those that sold him. This they themselves confessed. No sooner did they fall into trouble, than they thought of what they had done to Joseph, and their *consciences reproached*

them on account of it. "We are verily guilty (they *all* said) concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us and we would not hear. Therefore is this distress come upon us." They never doubted their own guilt; and who that has lived since, ever doubted it?

So in the story of Ruth the Moabitess. Whatever was wrong in the conduct of any individual concerned, was not the less so because events the most glorious in their results, seemed to grow out of it. "God's ways are not as our ways; nor his thoughts as our thoughts." We see but a little way into his plans. Such, indeed, is our shortsightedness, that they not only appear mysterious, but sometimes difficult, if not *altogether* contradictory. But the more we see of his ways, as they really are, the more we are satisfied with them; nay, the more glorious they appear. And there is a day at hand which will reveal whatever now appears mysterious, and loose whatever

is now sealed. There is a day at hand,
 which shall show us things as they
 really are ; a day in which all secrets
 will be revealed ; and which shall fully
 “justify the ways of God to man.”

*Swi**277949**Sof e**Sof e 227638**R. Larsson*

