

Ruth in Greater Men and Women of the Bible - James Hastings

RUTH from The Greater Men and Women of the Bible by James Hastings

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RUTH Ruth clave unto her.—Ruth 1:14.

1. THE Bible is a book of life, and it is true to life. God's dealings are alike in nature and in history; hill follows valley, light follows shadow, beauty and sublimity stand over against each other. So in the Bible we have the Book of Judges, full of war and tumult; and the Book of Samuel, full of more war and tumult. Men hate and steal and lie and kill until the heart is sick with the havoc which sin has wrought among men. But between those two books, as a beautiful valley full of flowers and fertile fields and with a gentle brook singing down through the meadows is often found between two mountain-ranges, is the Book of Ruth, a wonderful story of love and of holy character, filling all that part of the Old Testament with its fragrance.

2. The question has often been raised, what the purpose of the Book of Ruth is, and various answers have been given. The genealogical table at the end, showing David's descent from her, the example which it supplies of the reception of a Gentile into Israel, and other reasons for its presence in Scripture, have been alleged, and, no doubt, correctly. But the Bible is a very human book, just because it is a Divine one; and surely it would be no unworthy object to enshrine in its pages a picture of the noble working of that human love which makes so much of human life. The hallowing of the family is a distinct purpose of the Old Testament, and the beautiful example which this narrative gives of the elevating influence of domestic affection entitles it to a place in the Canon.

3. No literature contains a lovelier picture of womanhood in its various aspects than this brief Book of Ruth. There are three heroines, set in such a position as to bring out the portrait of Ruth herself to perfection. In the Church of St. Peter's at Rome there are three domes. Standing under one of the lesser domes that flank the transept, the spectator obtains a sense of dignity and size; this is increased when he passes under the dome of the transept itself; and it becomes a wonder bordering on ecstasy when at last he stands under the sublime central dome, which appears like the vault of heaven itself. So it might seem as if there were an artistic design to bring out the character of Ruth by first engaging our affection and admiration of the lesser figures. For Orpah is a sweet and attractive creature, clinging with daughterly affection to the mother of her husband, and clinging with an even greater affection to the land of her birth; and Naomi, the elder woman, is more beautiful still. Her life and character are sketched in a few masterstrokes, but from them the world has learned to love her. But, after all, she is only a foil to her daughter-in-law, Ruth the Moabitess. Ruth is the kind of woman that draws the world after her, not by a baleful gift of beauty—there is no hint that she was fair to look upon—but by the lasting qualities of unselfish devotion, of lowly serviceableness, of maidenly modesty. She is one of the characters that humanity loves to remember. Not only does the preacher turn to her story with enthusiasm, but the poet, when the passion and purity of the nightingale are captivating his heart, thinks instinctively of her, and fancies that the bewitching strain is—

Perhaps the selfsame song that found a path
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when sick for home,
She stood in tears amid the alien corn.

Men love to study the story because it touches them with the mystery and charm of early love; women love to study it because they recognize here the best type of womanhood.

4. The story itself is a simple one, made up of the ordinary elements of human life, and the actors in it are ordinary people But, as it proceeds, the beauty of Ruth's character is unfolded; and, from the moment of her affectionate determination to accompany Naomi, she becomes the central figure of the tale. From that point right on to the end it is emphatically the Book of Ruth.

I. IN MOAB

1. The village of Bethlehem is visited by famine. Driven to consternation, one of the families resolves to emigrate. It consists of a man Elimelech, his wife Naomi, and their two sons Mahlon and Chilion. They come into the land of Moab, a transition which means much more than a modern emigration from England to America. England and America are divided by the Atlantic; but Israel and Moab were separated by something to which the Atlantic is but a mill-pond—a difference in religion. To the Jew there was no land so distant as the land of a foreign worship. He measured all distance by the distance from his God. It was therefore a tremendous voyage which was taken by this family of Bethlehem, a voyage not to be estimated by miles, not to be gauged by the intervention of lands or seas, but to have its boundaries determined by the whole length and breadth of a universe of mind.

2. There seems to have been no absolute necessity why Elimelech should thus leave his home. Others tided over the period of distress, and so might he. But we may believe that the Bethlehemite, if he made a mistake in removing to Moab, acted in good faith and did not lose his hope of the Divine blessing. The people of Moab were nearly related to the people of Israel; but they had had a very different history. They were the descendants of Lot, the nephew of Abraham, but they had ceased to be the heirs of the covenant and of the promises. The pure faith that had grown up in the tents of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, which had blossomed forth into splendour in the days of Moses, had among the Moabites dwindled away and decayed and died. All that was noble in the old faith had completely disappeared. The Moabites had been a thorn in the flesh to Israel as they came out from Egypt and had even led them away into the practice of wickedness.

3. In the new and heathen land the emigrant family prospered not. In a few years Naomi was a widow and was left in very destitute circumstances. Her two sons married wives in the foreign country, adherents of the alien worship. Very soon these young men also sank by the wayside, weary with the burden and the heat of noonday toil; and, like their father, they left nothing. To all appearance Naomi was desolate. Husband and children were gone; poverty was extreme; the place of sojourn was a land of strangers; the voices of the old sanctuary were silent. Her heart and spirit were broken; her conscience was up in arms. The God of her fathers, she felt, had deserted her for her desertion of Him. She must retrieve the past; she must go back—back to the old soil, back to the favour of her God.

¶ There is nothing the human heart so much dreads as the thought of being utterly alone. I have felt it when walking about amid the surge and roar of London. To think of these dense masses of human beings utterly cut off from you makes you feel as if you were in the midst of perfect solitude. It is the thought of utter loneliness which gives its power and pathos to Hood's Bridge of Sighs. You remember the picture of the poor unfortunate alone on the bridge on that wild March night. The lines are among the most mournful ever penned. I learned them many long years ago from the lips of a Scone weaver, before I had ever heard of such a man as Hood. The sentiment of loneliness gives them their power. It is the same sentiment that gives its awfulness not only to Christ's death but to all death—that we must all leave the world alone; as De Quincey says: "King and priest, warrior and maiden, philosopher and child,—all must walk those mighty galleries alone." We all like to have a human hand in ours and a human heart beating for our own, at least in the great crises and troubles of life. There is One, the Friend that sticketh closer than a brother, who has promised that He will never leave us, never forsake us, not even when heart and flesh do faint and fail. Let us seek a closer interest in Him, the Holy Lamb of God. It will brighten every joy God may give us in life. It will soothe whatever sorrow He may send us to know and feel that in Christ we have a Brother and a Friend."

II. BACK TO BETHLEHEM

1. Naomi, broken-hearted and poverty-stricken, determined to go back and die in her native land. There was no thought on her part of taking her daughters-in-law back to Judah with her. She had never asked them to change their religion, and she felt it would not be a kindness to take them away from their own land and people. Under the impulse of affection, and without considering all the bearings of their action, Orpah and Ruth set out evidently with the intention of accompanying Naomi to Judah. She, apparently, is not aware of their intention, and supposes they have only come to see her off and to indulge in a last embrace, although they regard themselves as already on the way to the land of Judah. When, therefore, they reach the Ford of the Arnon, on the northern boundary of the Field of Moab, or, perhaps, when they reach the Fords of the Jordan, the eastern boundary of Judah, Naomi bids them return each to her mother's house, and prays that the Lord will deal kindly with them, as they have dealt with her dead and with her, and that He will grant that they may each find an "asylum" in the house of a new husband. As she clasps them in a parting

embrace, they lift up their voices and weep. They protest, "Nay, but we will return with thee unto thy people." And now Naomi has the delicate, difficult task of breaking to them, as gently as she may, the sad secret that, if they go with her, they will find no welcome from her people, no kindness from any but herself. And it is thus we reach the crisis, the moment of revelation of all three, but especially of Ruth.

2. Orpah, like Ruth, is faced by all that it means to carry out that journey to its end—all that it means in the surrender of worldly prospects, in the severing of old ties, in running new and quite incalculable risks. She has to face it, for Naomi herself, in her faithful witness to truth, puts it before them both quite plainly, and each in turn must make the great decision. Orpah the elder is the first to declare her choice. What it was Naomi records in the text: "Behold, thy sister in law is gone back unto her people, and unto her gods: return thou after thy sister in law." Ruth's life had now reached its decisive moment. It is the moment when the great choice has to be made on which everything, as regards her fulfilment of God's purpose, must depend. What a crisis it is! And how isolated, how seemingly alone, it finds her! So far she had moved step by step with Orpah. Now Orpah her sister-in-law—Orpah, side by side with whom she had accepted the hand of her Israelite husband; Orpah, who with her had bowed under the stroke of widowhood; Orpah, who with her had started to bear Naomi company on her return to Bethlehem—now Orpah has gone.

Behind her, in the sweet light of reminiscence, is Moab, the home of her childhood, of her mother and father: the scene of her friendships, the centre of her interests. Before her lies Israel with its dark, forbidding hills, its alien faces, its unknown trials. What calls her thither? To outward seeming, little. Ease, pleasure, even common prudence, as Naomi points out, bid her return to that land where love and hope are waiting for one so winning. Yes, but she "hears a voice we cannot hear." It is the voice of duty, of compassion, of faith, of love. This calls her on, and will not let her go. That desolate widow strikes her heart with a high heroic note. And not only that. It is no mere Naomi she sees standing before her there in piteous farewell. It is her dead husband's mother. Nay, more, it is her dead husband's faith, her dead husband's Jehovah. Can she go forward to make these her own? She can, and even now she will. With a resolution conveyed in suppressed fire, Ruth refuses to quit the side of Naomi. The words in which the resolve is uttered constitute the most determined, the most decisive, the most unhesitating confession of love in all literature.

Intreat me not to leave thee,
To return from following after thee:
Whither thou goest, I will go;
Where thou lodgest, I will lodge:
Thy people shall be my people,
Thy God shall be my God:
Where thou diest, will I die,
There also will I be buried:
Jehovah do so to me, and more also,
If ought but death part thee and me.

Ruth had conquered. Great as Naomi had been in nobleness of heart, in self-sacrificing love, from this time onwards she takes only the second place in the story; it is the younger woman who becomes the heroine of the tale. The Arnon is crossed, Moab is left behind, the Jordan is passed, and at last they reach the winding way that leads them up towards Bethlehem.

¶ The story of Ruth tells where David got his poetry and all the rhythm and melody of his life. The blood in the veins of this daughter of swarthy Moab here swells and surges in fine passion; and, in the music which she makes, her heart keeps the time which worlds of larger harmony beat. What a perfect little carol of love and duty to have been begotten without a moment's effort and flung to the mountain winds! We in the finest sense know Ruth as the "meek ancestress of him who sang the songs of sore repentance" the moment we hear her lift up that tuneful voice under the open sky between Moab and Bethlehem.

3. Ruth's passionate outburst of tenderness is immortal. It has put into fitting words for all generations the deepest thoughts of loving hearts, and comes to us over all the centuries between, as warm and living as when it welled up from that gentle, heroic soul. The two strongest emotions of our nature are blended in it, and each gives a portion of its fervour—love and religion. To love is to give one's self away, therefore all lesser givings are its food and delight; and, when Ruth threw herself on Naomi's withered breast, and sobbed out her passionate resolve, she was speaking the eternal language of love, and claiming Naomi for her own, in the very act of giving herself to Naomi. We hear in Ruth's words also that forsaking of all things which is an essential of all true religion. Her declaration closes with a vow to Israel's God. It dethrones Chemosh for ever. It exalts Jehovah as her future guide and shield. As such, we need not scruple to call it her "conversion." We have seen how, in her, human love wrought self-sacrifice. But it was not human love alone that did it. The cord that drew her was twisted of two strands, and her love to Naomi melted into her love of Naomi's God.

¶ I believe in the holy realities of friendship,—pure, lofty, intellectual; a communion of kindred affinities, of mental similitudes; a redemption from the miserable fetters of human selfishness; a practical obedience to the beautiful injunction of our Common Friend,

“Love thy neighbour as thyself.” I believe, too, that the pure love which we feel for our friends is a part and portion of that love which we owe and offer to our Creator and is acceptable to Him, inasmuch as it is offered not to the decaying elements of humanity, but to those brighter and holier attributes which are of themselves the emanations of the Divinity,—to those pure emotions of the heart and those high capacities of the soul in which that Divinity is most clearly manifested; and that, in proportion as we draw near to each other in the holy communion and unforbidden love of earthly friendship, we lessen the distance between our spirits and their Original Source,—just as the radii of a circle in approaching each other approach also their common centre.

4. In Ruth’s entrance into the religion of Israel we see a picture of what was intended to be the effect of Israel’s relation with the Gentile world. The household of Elimelech emigrated to Moab during a famine, and, whether that were right or wrong, they were there among heathens as Jehovah-worshippers. They were meant to be missionaries, and, in Ruth’s case, the purpose was fulfilled. She became the “firstfruits of the Gentiles.”

¶ When Christina Mackintosh was invited to go to Africa as the wife of Coillard, the missionary, she at first yielded to the opposition of her family and declined. Two years later François Coillard wrote once more. In this second appeal she perceived a call from God which she could not resist; but it was a terrible wrench to leave everything dear to her. She was no longer in her first girlhood, she had no illusions whatever as to the kind of life that awaited her; and it was not the kind she liked; she now preferred civilization to the wilds. Besides, going to Africa was very different then from now: it meant exile for life. Her widowed mother had become reconciled to the step she was taking, and wrote to her intended son-in-law that she “would rather see her daughter a missionary than a princess.” But opposition of another kind was not lacking; at this crisis of her life, the choice was deliberately put before her and as deliberately made. Her intended husband knew not all but something of what she was renouncing when he wrote, “I do not know that I could do what you are doing, giving up all for an unknown country and an almost unknown husband.”

At Cape Town her first words when they met were: “I have come to do the work of God with you, whatever it may be; and remember this—Wherever God may call you, you shall never find me crossing your path of duty.”

III. IN THE HARVEST FIELD

The whole city was moved at Naomi’s return, but no one seems to have been moved by her penitence and grief. She is left alone, save for “Ruth the Moabitess,” as the sacred historian once more calls her, to bring out the contrast between the tenderness of this heathen outcast and the austerity of the pious Hebrews of Bethlehem.

1. Ruth is a beautiful character—as beautiful from home as at home, in Bethlehem as in Moab. No sooner do we find her in Bethlehem than we see her in the field of Boaz, gleaning after the reapers. We have not only romance here, but romance wedded to reality, a combination of Mary and Martha. It is Ruth herself who suggests going out to the field to glean, a very lowly task indeed; not the honourable task of reaper, but that of following the reaper and gathering up the fragments, the humble place of the widow and the orphan and the very poor. Under the Jewish law the poor were permitted to glean in any field. It was against the law that the owner of the field should gather all the wheat and barley from the harvest; but the poor were suffered to gather the gleanings. That was their right.

We assign new honour to Ruth for entering these harvest fields. She took her place among the old and the sad and the poor. She was evidently too proud to beg; she was proud enough not even to grumble; but she was not too proud to do the bit of honest work which the great Taskmaster seemed to assign her in His wide household, wherein He bids every one work, with heart or brain or brow of sweat. She was meek and lowly in heart, and accepted the position of one of God’s poor, and her eyes waited upon the Lord her God until He had mercy on her.

¶ The fact of Ruth in these fields where the reapers reaped has a place like a fixture on the walls of human memory. The world’s vision of her among the corn is so pleasing that it is not allowed to pass away. Men of noble gifts as well as simple children have given their thought of her there some fine riveting; and, near their heart, she is with them to stay. Children unconsciously judge well both in literature and art; they remember best what is best worth remembering; they remember things by the heart; and the child has a picture of Ruth gleaning, in that elect recess of memory where are hung in elfin framing scenes from fairyland and from the enraptured balladry which the universal heart has sanctioned, and around which child-fancy plays with its gentlest wizardry.

2. So Ruth started out one morning to glean; and it happened, says the sacred narrative, that she lighted on the field of Boaz. Perhaps a pious writer would have said that Providence directed her footsteps there; but this writer is not too pious to use the

language of common life: “her hap was to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz.” She began her work; at noon this rich kinsman came down to the field, and was attracted by the young woman. The fame of Ruth’s virtue and piety, of her kindness to Naomi and her devotion to Naomi’s God, had preceded her; and Boaz no sooner learned who she was than he treated her with the utmost courtesy and respect, and sent her home laden with corn which she had gleaned.

Ruth’s modesty captured the heart of the God-fearing and prosperous farmer Boaz—a modesty that was the outcome of a genuine humility of heart. “I pray you, let me glean, and gather after the reapers among the sheaves”—not claiming it as a right, but looking upon it as a favour. Her grateful and graceful acknowledgment also of the kindness of Boaz when he took notice of the stranger and alien has a fine old-world flavour about it: “Then she fell on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, and said unto him, Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldest take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger?”

Her love, her willing sacrifice, her sublime, beautiful, womanly courage and daring; her cleaving to an aged woman who was bereaved, despoiled, homeless, and who felt herself put away by God—this it was that drew out the fire and the strength of the soul of Boaz, and caused him to name upon Ruth the name of his God: “The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust.” So he sets her devotion, the devotion of her pure human heart, in the soft, rosy radiance of his religion, and it burns and shines with the light and colours of all manner of precious stones.

The blessing of Boaz fell on the heart of Ruth like showers on the mown grass. Hitherto she had known only sorrow and shame. No Israelite had recognized her, or helped her, or shown either any appreciation of her noble love for her mother-in-law or any wish to welcome her to the faith and privilege of Israel. To all but Boaz she was simply “the Moabitess”—a stranger to the Covenant, an alien from the Commonwealth. But now the valiant soldier whom all Bethlehem praised, who sat as judge and teacher among his people, blesses her for her goodness, and assures her of the protection and goodwill of the God of Israel.

¶ A man feels in himself the love of praise. Every man does who is not a brute. It is a universal human faculty; Carlyle nicknames it the sixth sense. Who made it? God or the devil? Is it flesh or spirit? A difficult question; because tamed animals grow to possess it in a high degree; and our metaphysic does not yet allow them spirit. But, whichever it be, it cannot be for bad: only bad when misdirected, and not controlled by reason, the faculty which judges between good and evil. Else why has God put His love of praise into the heart of every child which is born into the world, and entwined it into the holiest, filial, and family affections, as the earliest mainspring of good actions? Has God appointed that every child shall be fed first with a necessary lie, and afterwards come to the knowledge of your supposed truth, that the praise of God alone is to be sought? Or are we to believe that the child is intended to be taught as delicately and gradually as possible the painful fact, that the praise of all men is not equally worth having, and to use his critical faculty to discern the praise of good men from the praise of bad, to seek the former and despise the latter? I should say that the last was the more reasonable. And this I will say, that if you bring up any child to care nothing for the praise of its parents, its elders, its pastors, and masters, you may make a fanatic of it, or a shameless cynic: but you will neither make it a man, an Englishman, nor a Christian.

IV. BY THE THRESHING-FLOOR

1. Naomi was profoundly impressed by the extraordinary favour shown to her daughter-in-law by her husband’s kinsman, and saw in it an answer to her prayers and a promise of future blessing. And as the days of harvest passed, and evening by evening the girl returned with her store of grain and with fresh stories of the unfailing kindness she had experienced, Naomi formed a resolution in her mind for the welfare of this dear girl who had followed her into a strange land, and was here toiling to maintain her. Boaz, she told her daughter-in-law, was “one of those who should redeem” them.

Among the Hebrews the family relationship was a very close one; blood was always felt to be thicker than water. Did an Israelite become poor, and was he forced to sell his field, the duty of the next-of-kin was to buy it back again; was he sold as a slave, his kinsman’s duty was to redeem him. Was he accidentally slain, the next-of-kin became the avenger of his blood, and pursued his slayer to the very gate of the city of refuge. He had still another and more delicate duty, altogether alien to our modern and Western notions. Did an Israelite die without children, leaving a widow behind him, it became the duty of the next-of-kin to marry the widow, so that children, as nearly related as possible in blood, might receive the inheritance of him who had passed away. It was to this law that Naomi now thought of appealing. Ruth indeed was a stranger and a foreigner, and her claim upon Israelite law might easily have been evaded; it was the kindness shown her by Boaz during the harvest season that inspired Naomi to make the attempt.

2. Naomi’s plot was a bold one. She sent Ruth to claim Boaz as the kinsman whose duty it was to marry her and become her protector. Ruth was to go to the threshing-floor on the night of the harvest festival, wait until Boaz lay down to sleep beside the mass of winnowed grain, and place herself at his feet, so reminding him that, if no other would, it was his part to be a husband to her for

the sake of Elimelech and his sons. The plan was daring and appears to us to be at least indelicate. It is impossible to say whether any custom of the time sanctioned it; but even in that case we cannot acquit Naomi of resorting to a stratagem with the view of bringing about what seemed most desirable for Ruth and herself.

The relations between Naomi and Ruth are to be remembered at this point. Ruth was a stranger in Bethlehem, and in the ways and manners of the land she knew not her right hand from her left. But Naomi was an old inhabitant; she knew about everything, and had such guidance of Ruth that whenever she said "Do this," we may be sure that Ruth did it. Not only so, but, under the awe of her recently espoused religion, the strangest law and rite of the country would have a sacredness in Ruth's eyes; and never would she be less inclined to hesitate and question than when some holy mystery was flung around Naomi's directions. This view of the half-alluring, half-entangling power of religion in her case seems to be both indicated and verified by the instant way in which she replied, when Naomi, with just an insinuation of the Divine sanction, bade her do very strange things: "All that thou sayest unto me I will do."

3. Perhaps Naomi knew, or suspected, that Boaz looked with kindness, with respect and admiration, on Ruth. Perhaps, too, she was aware of the two considerations which held him back from seeking a wife in Ruth. These considerations were, as we learn from the third chapter, first, that there was a nearer kinsman than himself, who had a prior legal claim on Ruth; and secondly, that he was very much older than Ruth, and hesitated to place himself in the way of a more suitable and equal match.

Nor did Ruth suffer loss through the blundering of Naomi, for this interview with Boaz straightened out the difficulty which otherwise would still have caused him to refrain from interfering with their concerns. How differently things might have turned out if he had not been wiser than Naomi and more jealous for his own reputation as well as Ruth's. He saved the situation for both, and to him all the credit is due, not to the woman who devised this plan of bringing them together.

4. Ruth's claim, once made, put Boaz in a different position; he would now see her righted or would right her himself. In his heart he was overjoyed. In his view she had shown "more kindness in the latter end than at the beginning." Then she had been willing for the sake of Naomi to leave her father, her mother, her country and her religion. Now she wished to obey the law of Israel, and to show kindness unto the family of Elimelech. But Boaz did not simply laud her fidelity and piety. He promised that, should the nearer kinsman refuse the duty and honour, he himself would redeem her dead husband's name and inheritance. Probably Boaz found it hard to utter the words, "There is a nearer goel than I"; for obviously by this time, as his allusion to "the young men" indicates, he was deeply attached to his young kinswoman. And it illustrates the nobility of his character, his honour and integrity, that he should propose to give this "nearer kinsman" his legal due, although to give it might cost him no small sacrifice.

When in the morning Ruth returned with her six measures of barley, Naomi felt that the battle was won, and that all that was now necessary was to possess their souls in patience for a little and they would see the end.

¶ Shakespeare says—

There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough hew them how we will.

And that Divine One will shape everything towards the end He has planned, if He may have our consent. This is the working basis of the whole problem of guidance. It simplifies it much. It is not coaxing a friendly God to keep us along a path we have marked out for ourselves. It is finding and fitting into the plan lovingly thought out for us, and doing the service assigned to us in the great world-plan. Guidance is a matter of finding God's plan and following it faithfully step by step. A man should aim to have a keen understanding of what God's plan for him is. The likeness of God imprinted upon him puts him under obligation to find out the plan of God intended for him.

V. AT THE GATE

The open space at the gate of the city was the place where legal decisions were given by the Elders and the greater part of the business of the town was transacted. That gate had already seen a great part of the story. It had seen Elimelech, rich in flocks and herds, setting out for the land of Moab. It had seen Naomi returning, poor, friendless and desolate. It had seen Ruth going forth every morning to the harvest-field; it had seen her returning with her gleanings in the evening. It was but fitting that the gate should see how it was all to end.

¶ At the present day the people of the East have reverted to their primitive customs regarding the uses of the gate, and many business and social duties are carried out there. Thomson (*The Land and the Book*, i. 31) mentions having seen at Jaffa the Kâḍi and his court sitting at the entrance of the gate, hearing and adjudicating all sorts of cases in the audience of all that went in and out thereat. At Suakin in 1886 Sir Charles Warren found it necessary to sit at the gate to transact official business in order that the public might freely

approach and relate their grievances. Bertrandon de la Brocquière (Early Travels, 349, A.D. 1433) gives an interesting account of his reception at the court of the Turks, the "Sublime Porte," at Constantinople. The ambassadors were received at the gate of the palace, and all business was transacted there. Chardin relates that the principal gate of the royal palace of Ispahan was held sacred, and used by criminals as a place of refuge. Sir Charles Warren conducted all his business transactions with the governors of Al-Arish, Nukl, and Akabah in 1882 at the gate, where there were arched roofs giving protection from the sun and rain, and seats for the administration of justice. At Nukl the council chamber was immediately over the gate. The city gateways of the present day have usually flanking towers and overhead galleries, with an arched passage within, so that a second set of gates may be erected inside the barbican or courtyard.

1. Early in the morning Boaz appeared on this bustling scene, and waited until the kinsman of whom he had spoken to Ruth came by. Hailing him, he asked him to sit down by his side, and in the presence of ten chosen Elders he opened his business. Two matters were involved: the inheritance of Elimelech in Israel, and the acceptance of Ruth the Moabitess as the representative of the family of Elimelech. As regards the first, the redemption of the land, the nearer kinsman had no scruples; he would do his duty. As regards the second, he was unwilling to interfere; he preferred that his rights should pass over to Boaz. The reason he gave was, "Lest I mar my own inheritance." He did not wish to have anything to do with Moabites or Moabitesses; perhaps he shared in the feeling that on their account all this evil had come upon the family of Elimelech. In any case he would run no risks, he would look after himself. So drawing off his shoe he handed it to Boaz, this being at once a symbolic transference of his rights, and a modified form of the old penalty attaching to the non-fulfilment of the law.

¶ The establishing of a connexion with a property is indicated by a man casting one of his shoes upon it. This is based upon the fact that walking upon a piece of ground is a sign of proprietorship. We may recall the Roman custom of bringing before the prætor a clod of earth from the field which one claimed as his property. A certain relation was established also when Elijah the prophet cast his mantle upon Elisha. A special meaning may be discovered in this act, namely, the investiture with the prophetic mantle. So the covering of a woman with one's mantle (Ezek. 16:8; Ruth 3:9) expresses the intention of becoming her protector par excellence, i.e. of marrying her. The correct view of Ezek. 16:8 and Ruth 3:9 is confirmed by Arab custom. "The son who, in the heathen period of Arab history, took over the widow of his father, threw his garment over her. So, too, Mohammed cast his mantle over the Jewess Safija, captured at Khaibar, as a token that he desired to have her in marriage."

The opposite condition of things, namely, the dissolution of relations, is indicated as follows. One person takes off another's shoe (Deut. 25:9), or the wearer removes it himself (Ruth 4:8). The idea at the basis of this act may be explained thus. Seeing that one enters upon the occupancy of a field by treading upon it with his shoes, the pulling off of the shoe indicates the intention of not carrying out this occupancy. The drawing off of the shoe was also, among the Arabs, a special sign of the dissolution of a marriage.

2. With profound and solemn emotion Boaz called on the Elders and the circle of bystanders to observe and remember this legal transfer of rights and duties, expressing himself, however, with legal fulness and precision: "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." They replied: "We are witnesses"—thus completing the legal transaction—and broke out into a profusion of good wishes which amply verified the statement of Boaz concerning Ruth in the previous chapter: "All the gate of my people doth know that thou art a virtuous woman." They lifted her to the level of the most famous women of Israel by praying that she might be like Rachel and Leah, the mothers of the twelve tribes. They would not have uttered this prayer if they had not come to esteem her, for her love and piety, as an Israelite indeed. It was a happy day to both Boaz and Ruth when, amidst the benedictions of all present, they were united, and next to the joy of the bride and bridegroom Naomi's was probably the greatest.

¶ Ruth and Boaz in the union of their actual lives represented the marriage of the Gentile and the Jew. Ruth was the child of Moab, the daughter of a foreign soil, the votary of a heathen religion; Boaz was a genuine son of Israel who had never separated from the parent stem, whose blood had never been tinged with intermixture from without. Their union symbolized the meeting of extremes, prefigured an age of charity, when the hearts of men should be larger than their creeds and the spirit of nations bigger than their boundaries. In the soul of Jesus the wedding-bells of Ruth and Boaz are rung once more. Here again Moab and Israel meet together. In the heart of the Son of Man the Gentile stands side by side with the Jew as the recipient of a common Divine Fatherhood. What is it but the sound of wedding-bells that He hears when He cries, "Many shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God"? What is it but the footsteps of Ruth that He discerns when He exclaims, "Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold"?

What is it but the tread of Moab in the field that catches His ear when He makes the qualification for approach to Him not human possession but human need, "Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest"? The marriage-bells of Ruth at Bethlehem were the same bells which sounded at the marriage-supper of the Lamb.

3. The curtain rises again for one brief moment to give us a sweet glimpse of domestic life in the household of Boaz. We see Ruth, a happy wife and a still happier mother. We see Naomi, spending the calm evening of her clouded life, not separated from the abiding love of her daughter-in-law, living once more in the new representative of the house of Elimelech. It is to her, not to Ruth, that the congratulations of the women are addressed. For in a true sense the babe was hers, the restorer of her life, the nourisher of her old age, the builder up of the fortunes of her house, because in him the great love of her daughter-in-law had become a visible, an embodied fact.

No finer tribute could have been paid to the character of Ruth than the tribute paid by the neighbours after the birth of her child. All feeling of jealousy against the alien who has come among them has passed away, and in congratulating Naomi they express themselves in this way: "Thy daughter in law, which loveth thee, which is better to thee than seven sons, hath borne this child." Coming from those women of Bethlehem who at the first must have envied the good fortune of Ruth and looked upon this union with one of their best citizens as a slight upon their own daughters—coming from such neighbours, it is a splendid tribute to the qualities alike of head and of heart possessed by Ruth.

And so the story closes, not simply leaving these two brave and noble women happy in each other, and in Boaz, and in Obed his son, but weaving for them an immortal crown of honour in that it marks their intimate connexion with David, the "darling of Israel," and with Him who was at once David's Son and Lord. "Boaz begat Obed, and Obed begat Jesse, and Jesse begat David"; and of David, as concerning the flesh, came Jesus the Christ, the Light of the Gentiles and the Glory of the people of Israel.

¶ Ruth's voluntary and wonderful attachment to Israel's people, and land, and God—attachment testified in sorest trial, when all hope seemed gone, and there was but an aged, childless, homeless widow to cling to—had its reward correspondent to the intense love, and devotion, and disinterestedness. That reward, what is it? Behold it first in the favour and then in the plighted troth of Boaz. Behold it in Ruth of Moab as the ancestress of the royal house of David. Behold it in Ruth of Moab as the ancestress of Jesus Christ our Lord. Behold it in that Book of Ruth forming a part of inspired Scripture, with its simple, pathetic story—a sacred pastoral poem. The less we put our service of God in the form of bargain and covenant, the more likely are we to fare with special richness at the end.

But go to! thy love

Shall chant itself its own beatitudes
After its own life-working. A child's kiss
Set on thy sighing lips shall make thee glad;
A poor man served by thee shall make thee rich;
A sick man helped by thee shall make thee strong;
Thou shalt be served thyself by every sense
Of service which thou renderest. Such a crown
I set upon thy head.

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