

THE BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR.
RUTH.

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OR,

ANECDOTES, SIMILES, EMBLEMS, ILLUSTRATIONS, EXPOSITORY,
SCIENTIFIC, GEOGRAPHICAL, HISTORICAL, AND HOMILETIC,
GATHERED FROM A WIDE RANGE OF HOME AND
FOREIGN LITERATURE, ON THE VERSES
OF THE BIBLE.

BY

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RUTH.

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INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF RUTH.

THE DATE OF THE BOOK.—The story is placed “in the days when the judges ruled” (chap. i. 1), about a century before the time of David; but on its own showing it was not written till long after the events it describes (chap. iv. 7). How long afterwards is a question on which critics are not agreed; most of them consider it to be exilic (Ewald) or post-exilic (Bertheau, Wellhausen, Kuenen), mainly on the linguistic and genealogical evidence; but Driver (Introduction to O.T., 1891) thinks that the general beauty and purity of the style, which stand on a level with the best parts of Samuel, point rather to a date, which he does not seek to fix more definitely, before the exile. That the book was not received into the canon till a very long time after the captivity is shown by its place in the original Hebrew, where it occurs as one of the Hagiographa or “writings,” standing second among the five Megilloth or Festal Rolls, between Canticles and Lamentations, a position which proves that it did not become canonical till after the series of “former prophets,” extending from Joshua to 2 Kings, had been finally closed. In the LXX., however, which gives it the place it claims in the historical order, it comes between Judges and Samuel, and the same order is observed in the Vulgate and in the English A.V. That Josephus also must have reckoned it as an appendix to Judges is shown by his enumeration of the books of the O.T. as numbering only 22. (*Chambers's Encyclopædia*.) More than one reason may be found for supposing the book to have been written in Solomon's time, probably the latter part of his reign, when law and ordinances had multiplied and were being enforced in endless detail by a central authority; when the manners of the nations around—Chaldea, Egypt, Phœnicia—were overbearing the primitive ways of Israel; when luxury was growing, societies dividing into classes, and a proud imperialism giving its colour to habit and religion. If we place the book at this period, we can understand the moral purpose of the writer and the importance of his work. He would teach people to maintain the spirit of Israel's past, the brotherliness, the fidelity in every relation that were to have been all along a distinction of Hebrew life because inseparably connected with the obedience of Jehovah. The splendid temple on Moriah was now the centre of a great priestly system, and from temple and palace the national, and to a great extent the personal, life of all Israelites was largely influenced, not in every respect for good. The quiet suggestion is here made that the artificiality and the pomp of the kingdom did not compare well with that old time when the affairs of an ancestress of the splendid monarch were settled by a gathering at a village gate. (*R. A. Watson, M.A.*) The tone of the book throughout is liberal and tolerant to the Gentiles; and part of its design—unconsciously to its author perhaps, but not the less intentional with God—seems to be to prepare for the time when through the promised Messiah the middle wall of partition between the Jews and other nations should be broken down. Now the reign of David appears to have been the only portion of Jewish history during

which such a spirit towards the Gentiles was shown without any breach of loyalty to Jehovah. This fact, taken in connection with the personal relation of David to the heroine of the story, seems to make it probable that the book was written some time during David's reign, and we know that the royal psalmist had contemporaries who, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, might have produced such a work. Indeed, there is much in the simple pathos of the parable of the ewe lamb to remind us of the idyllic beauty of the Book of Ruth, and both might well enough have come from the prophet Nathan. (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*)

THE PLACE OF THE BOOK IN THE BIBLE.—The walls of the great palace at Versailles are covered with paintings of battles. The Bastille, Jena, Austerlitz, the Pyramids! Agony, passion, and death! Heroism and victory! One grows weary with the endless profusion of art. He sits down at last on the casement of a little window. He looks out. Here, too, is a picture. Peaceful France, with its green grass, its forests and fields, and its church tower beyond the placid lake. The Book of Ruth is such a little window amidst the historical pictures, the battle pieces of Israel. Through this window we see the home life which the pictures have hidden—godliness, unselfishness, love and peace. Is it not well for us to turn from the historic, the heroic, and, through some rift, take a swift, sweet glimpse of the pastoral and domestic scenes of life? We read of Sisera's murder and Jephthah's vow and Samson's revenge, and we think ill of Israel. Ruth gives us another view and a truer view. It is not for books and newspapers to publish what is ordinary and commonplace. They publish the remarkable, the wonderful. The very fact that a matter is publishable is fair evidence that it is exceptional. Let us remember this. Let us remember that little Ruth is the rule, and not the exception. Thus, we will think better of Israel and of all the world. (*R. S. Barrett.*)

OBJECT AND CONTENTS OF THE BOOK.—These four things seem the object of the Book of Ruth: to present a supplement by way of contrast to the Book of Judges; to show the true spirit of Israel; to exhibit once more the mysterious connection between Israel and the Gentiles, whereby the latter, at the most critical periods of Israel's history, seem most unexpectedly called in to take a leading part; and to trace the genealogy of David. Specially perhaps the latter two. For, as one has beautifully remarked, if, as regards its contents, the Book of Ruth stands on the threshold of the history of David, yet, as regards its spirit, it stands, like the Psalms, at the threshold of the gospel. Not merely on account of the genealogy of Christ, which leads up to David and Boaz, but on account of the spirit which the teaching of David breathes, do we love to remember that Israel's great king sprang from the union of Boaz and Ruth, which is symbolical of that between Israel and the Gentile world. (*A. Edersheim, D.D.*) It is a supplement to the Book of Judges, and an introduction to that of Samuel. Neither of these give an account of David's ancestors; this omission our story supplies. Ruth was that glorious king's great-grandmother. Now, unless we had known this, and also that Boaz was of the house of Judah, it would have been impossible to verify the prophecy that Christ the Messiah should descend from the royal tribe. This is one prominent purpose—to announce David's ancestry, and consequently to prove that the Saviour was "a lion of the tribe of Judah." And what an attractive picture of those ancestors it is! What uprightness and singleness of heart, what piety and modesty and purity of life are found to characterise them! Though it was not accounted a flattering distinction, but quite the reverse, to have heathen progenitors, yet if any character could effectively destroy this deeply-rooted prejudice, then that of the gentle and loving Ruth must do it. (*Wm. Braden.*) Does it not tell us that not only on the city and the palace, and on the cathedral and the college, on the assemblies of statesmen, and on the studies of scholars, but upon the meadow and the corn-field, the farm-house and the cottage, is written by the everlasting finger of God, "Holiness unto the Lord"? That all is blessed in His sight? That the lowly dwellers in villages, the simple tillers of the ground, can be as godly and as pious, as virtuous and as high-minded, as those who have nought to do but to serve God in the offices of religion? Is it not an honour and a comfort, to such as us, to find one whole book of the Holy Bible occupied by the simplest story of the fortunes of a yeoman's family in a lonely village among the hills of Judah? (*Canon Kingsley.*)

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RUTH.

CHAPTER I.

VER. 1. In the days when the judges ruled.—*The transition from Judges to Ruth*:—Leaving the Book of Judges and opening the story of Ruth, we pass from vehement out-door life, from tempest and trouble, into quiet domestic scenes. After an exhibition of the greater movements of a people we are brought, as it were, to a cottage interior in the soft light of an autumn evening, to obscure lives passing through the cycles of loss and comfort, affection and sorrow. We have seen the ebb and flow of a nation's fidelity and fortune; a few leaders appearing clearly on the stage, and behind them a multitude indefinite, indiscriminate, the thousands who form the ranks of battle and die on the field, who sway together from Jehovah to Baal, and back to Jehovah again. What the Hebrews were at home, how they lived in the villages of Judah or on the slopes of Tabor, the narrative has not paused to speak of with detail. Now there is leisure after the strife, and the historian can describe old customs and family events, can show us the toiling flockmaster, the busy reapers, the women with their cares and uncertainties, the love and labour of simple life. Thunderclouds of sin and judgment have rolled over the scene; but they have cleared away, and we see human nature in examples that become familiar to us, no longer in weird shadow or vivid lightning flash, but as we commonly know it, homely, erring, enduring, imperfect, not unblest. (*R. A. Watson, M.A.*) **There was a famine in the land.**—*Famine, the consequence of sin*:—This might happen many ways: by the incursion of foreign enemies, by civil wars among themselves, or by restraint of seasonable showers from heaven. Howsoever it came, sin was the cause thereof: a toleration of idolaters and public monuments of idolatry (Judg. i. 21, 27, 29, 30, and iii. 5, and ii. 2), contrary to God's express commandment by the hand of Moses. They fell themselves unto idolatry (ii. 11, 12, 13, 17, and viii. 27). I. THAT SINS, ESPECIALLY THOSE AFORENAMED, DESERVE THE JUDGMENTS OF GOD (Deut. xxviii.; 1 Kings viii. 35-37). Therefore, to escape plagues, let us take heed of sin (Ezek. xviii. 31; Rev. xviii.). II. THAT FAMINE AND DEARTH IS A PUNISHMENT FOR SIN, AND THAT A GREAT PLAGUE (Ezek. v. 16; Deut. xxviii. 23, 24; Lev. xxvi. 19, 29; Amos iv.). And when this hand of God cometh upon us, let us search our ways and humble ourselves (2 Chron. vii. 14), that the Lord may heal our land, for it is a terrible judgment (1 Sam. xxiv. 14) and without mercy (2 Kings vi. 10, 29; Ezek. iv. 10). III. We may hereby see HOW GOD MADE HIS WORD GOOD UPON THEM, and that He dallieth not with His people, in denouncing judgments against them; for Moses had told them (Deut. xxviii.) that God would thus afflict them if rebellious against Him: and here the story telleth us that in the days of the judges this famine came. (*R. Bernard.*) *A famine in the land!*—in the land of promise and in Bethlehem, the House of Bread! No doubt the state of affairs in Bethlehem constituted a severe trial of faith to Elimelech and his family and neighbours. It is very hard to see the meal growing less and less in the barrel; it is even harder for those who have enjoyed times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord, and seasons of genuine delight in His service, to lose the experience of the Divine love and care, to find prayer becoming a burden and the Word of God

lifeless and unhelpful; but can either the one condition of things or the other be any excuse or justification for forsaking the land of promise? For, to begin with, how can a change of front help us under the circumstances? If corn be scarce in Canaan, where God has pledged Himself to feed us, is it likely that better things will be found in a land upon which, as we shall see, His curse is resting? If from any cause our sense of the presence and approval of Jesus seems to have lost something of its distinctness, even in that circle of Church life and Christian society with which we have been associated, is it probable that we shall obtain truer solace and renewal in that "world" the friendship of which is declared to be enmity to our Lord? And, after all, what is the province of faith if it be of no service to us under such circumstances as these? Christ, as we well know, changes not; if there be a change in our experience of Him, the causes lie with us, and not with our Lord—the clouds are earth-born; what we need is more sun, not less, and this we shall never obtain by turning our back upon Him from whom every blessing of spiritual experience, as well as of earthly enjoyment, flows. It is pretty certain that, like Elimelech, those whose hearts are growing colder would protest almost with indignation that they have no intention of any permanent abandonment of Christ. They are suffering from famine—from a loss of spiritual enjoyment. To what may this unhappy state of things be due? Some, perhaps, would frankly aver that they never have found enjoyment in Christ and His service from the very commencement; they have sought to serve Him purely as a matter of duty: for their pleasure they have looked to the world. Some, again, would admit that there are both food and enjoyment in the Divine life for those who desire to follow Christ, and at one time they themselves hoped that it would prove permanently satisfying; but they confess that they got tired of it after a time, and it seemed rather hard to them that they should be required to limit themselves to that which, however good in itself, appeared to be somewhat restricted in character. Now, our Bread is Christ, and dissatisfaction with our Bread is dissatisfaction with Him, and confessions such as those to which we have been listening simply mean that the Lord Jesus has ceased to be, or more probably has never been in any very real sense, everything to us; such persons as those whose cases we have imagined have not actually given up serving and loving the Lord, or at any rate do not think they have done so, but into a heart which has never been completely surrendered to the Master they have admitted other objects of regard, and these later affections, competing with that earlier one, have dimmed its lustre and loosened its hold upon us. And are there not others who, whilst desiring after a fashion to lead a Christian life, deliberately place themselves beyond the reach, so to speak, of the nourishing and fructifying grace of God by the very character of the circumstances by which they elect to surround themselves? Their friends, their amusements, their books (not to mention other matters) seem to be chosen almost with a view to hindering instead of assisting their growth in Christ. But the Holy Spirit is Sovereign; He is the Lord of life as well as the giver of it, and He feeds the souls who seek Him in accordance with His own will, not in accordance with theirs. And the famine in Bethlehem took place "in the days when the judges ruled." It is impossible to read the historian's account of those days (Judg. ii. 11, &c.) without realising that the times were very bad indeed, and just such as we should expect to be characterised by famine and distress of all kinds. For, to begin with, they were days of religion by fits and starts—days in which the Israelites served God when they were in trouble and forgot Him as soon as their circumstances improved. Is it likely that such a condition of things and such a fashion of living can succeed? Will God bless those who, blind to His long-suffering, set every law of gratitude and right behaviour at defiance in this hopeless kind of way? But is not this precisely what some of us are constantly doing? No, religion by fits and starts cannot possibly be a happy state of affairs: it must involve us in that separation from God which results in famine. We shall not improve our circumstances, however, by turning our backs upon God; let us understand that our want is due to our own conduct, not to God's unfaithfulness, and let us seek so to amend our lives that He may yet be able to make our land flow with milk and honey. Moreover, the days when the judges ruled were obviously days of intermittent government: the arrangement was but a makeshift at the best. In our own case it is the absence of the autocratic rule of the Lord Jesus, or rather our fretful murmuring against the rule, which lies at the root of most of our spiritual sorrow. We acknowledge the Lord as our Saviour, but do we sufficiently recognise Him to be Christ our King? It is

impossible for us to fear the Lord and serve our own gods, and be happy—try as we may. That there are times in the experience of all Christian people when the pasture which once was green fails somewhat of its peaceful restfulness no one who knows anything of life will for a moment deny. But this is neither starvation nor a breaking of faith on the part of our covenant God. Elimelech left Bethlehem in a moment of panic, or a fit of despondency or of world-hunger, but others remained and trusted the God of their fathers; and when ten years later Naomi, the solitary survivor of the little band, returned, she found her friends alive and well and in the enjoyment of barley harvest. They had been tried, indeed, but never forsaken. It was sad enough that Elimelech should have left the land of promise and the House of Bread: it was worse that he should have selected Moab as his new home. It was not merely that the people of the country were heathen, and that, as Elimelech must have known, if he and his family were to remain true to God they would have to lead lives of trial and to face unpopularity and perhaps persecution, but Moab had acted with extraordinary bitterness to his ancestors in times past, and in consequence was under a very terrible curse. Are we in no danger? Are there none of us who are beginning to turn our heads, and our hearts too, in the direction of those old associations and those old surroundings which did us so much injury in the past—the scars of whose wounds, the fascination of whose attractions, have not yet passed away? Are we wise in venturing where stronger men than we are have fallen, where we ourselves fell not so long ago? God help us, and keep us true to Him and to ourselves! (*H. A. Hall, B.D.*) **Bethlehem-judah.**—*The famine in Bethlehem*:—The home of Elimelech was in Bethlehem—"Bethlehem-judah" as the historian is careful to remark, in order to distinguish it from another Bethlehem in the territory of the tribe of Zebulun. Its very name—Bethlehem, i.e., House of Bread—indicates its fertility. And therefore the famine which drove Elimelech from Bethlehem must have been extraordinarily protracted and severe; even the most wealthy and fertile parts of the land must have been consumed by drought: there was no bread even in the very House of Bread. Elimelech and his household were by no means likely to be the first to feel the pinch of want, or to feel it most keenly; for he came of a good stock, of a family that stood high in the tribe of Judah, and was a man of consideration and wealth. The probability is that he was rich in flocks and herds, a sheep-master such as Bethlehem has constantly produced, and that it was to find pastures for his famishing flocks that he went to sojourn in Moab. (*S. Cox, D.D.*) **He, and his wife, and his two sons.**—*Family names*:—The names are thoroughly Jewish, and are rich in meaning. Elimelech was a grand name for a pious man; it means, "My God is King." The mother is called Naomi, "the gracious" or "sweetness." Mahlon means "weakly," and Chilion, "pining" or "wasting," referring probably to their bodily condition; for as they both died young it is possible they were ailing from their birth. But it is noteworthy that in those olden times parents were accustomed to give their children names according to some peculiarity in their circumstances, or in the fond hope that the special virtue implied in the name might be developed in after-life. Isaac's firstborn is Esau, because of the redness of his skin. Moses in exile calls his son Gershom, "For," he said, "I have been a stranger in a strange land." The custom is dying out in these modern times. Parents give children names without inquiring the meaning; the sound is more to them than the sense. But there may be more involved, for good or evil, in the old custom than we suppose. Shakespeare asks, "What's in a name? A rose by any other name would smell as sweet." True, but as an American writer points out, "The influence of names in the formation of character is probably much greater than is usually imagined, and deserves the special attention of parents in their bestowment. Children should be taught that the circumstances of their bearing the names of good men or women who have lived before them constitutes an obligation upon them to imitate or perpetuate their virtues." It does not follow that the desired result will be obtained, yet it may be an influence; and at least the name, when contrasted with the life, will be a constant rebuke. (*Wm. Braden.*)

Ver. 2. They came into the country of Moab, and continued there.—*Lessons from the conduct of Elimelech and Naomi*:—1. Learn from the change in the circumstances of Naomi's husband not to trust in the uncertain possessions of this world. You may now be wealthy and respectable among your neighbours and acquaintances; a few years or months may reduce you to a condition of discomfort,

if not of poverty and indigence. 2. Learn from the consequences of the step taken by Elimelech, the peril of discontentedness and impatience under adverse circumstances. Should riches make themselves wings, and poverty threaten to be your lot, beware of rashly changing your habits and connections. 3. Ye that are parents, surrounded with a family of children, learn from this history to reflect how soon those children may be taken away. And oh! strive and pray, above all things, that they may be the children of God by faith in Jesus Christ. 4. Learn from Naomi's trials the beneficial effects of affliction; and from her resolution to return to her native land—the land of Jehovah's worship—that the only true refuge in affliction is pure and undefiled religion. (*H. Hughes, B.D.*) *The Wanderers*:—Thus the history of Ruth begins with a story of wanderers from God. It is a sad, but not a strange commencement. I. WHY DID THEY WANDER, AND THUS LEAVE THE HOME OF THEIR FATHERS? The answer given is, "There was a famine in the land." God had sent upon them a temporary trouble, and they fled from it. But when God chastens us in His wisdom, our duty is to yield with contentment and submission. We should bear the rod and Him who hath appointed it. When we patiently yield to His merciful chastisements, they become our most precious blessings. "There was a famine in the land," and they fled from it. Temporary sufferings made their home for a little while uncomfortable, and they could not patiently endure the will of God. It was their own land. It was their father's land. It was the Lord's land. Their family and friends were there. Why should they fly? The next season might be better, and more than repay them for the losses of the present. The famine might follow them to the land whither they went, and make their sufferings greater there than at home. When Socrates was urged by his friends to escape from the prison where he was condemned to die, he answered them, "Tell me of a land where men do not die, and I will escape to that." How much better might this family have found a quiet submission to the will of God! What an illustration this is of sinful, foolish man! Adam had all the garden of Eden. One single restraint made him a voluntary wanderer from God. How easily have all who have descended from him rebelled and wandered since! But can we ever find happiness in running away from God? Is there any happiness but in a cheerful, filial submission to God? See where this wandering from God begins—in a spirit of rebellion and discontent. Oh, be ye watchful there. Be ready to hear and to do the will of God. In the midst of your trials remember His mercies. II. BUT WHO WERE THESE WANDERERS WHOSE STORY WE HAVE BEFORE US? They were a family of Israelites, of professed believers in the Word of God. Never does sin seem to be more dreadful than when man's ingratitude is contrasted with God's mercies. You are never straitened in God. You have all things and abound in Him. He is rich in His mercy to you all. Why should you wander? III. THIS WANDERING WAS WHOLLY UNNECESSARY. These Israelites were not poor and perishing. They "went out full." Their wandering was therefore wilful, and this made it the more rebellious and guilty. But is not all wandering from God unnecessary? Why need we ever go astray from Him? It will be always a solemn charge against us, "they went out full." It is the wandering which makes us empty. If we go away from God our own heedlessness or choice is the fountain of our guilt and sorrow. Why need we wander? IV. FROM WHENCE DID THESE ISRAELITES WANDER? It was from the Lord's own land, Immanuel's land. It was from the whole company of His people. It was from the midst of the privileges of Divine revelation. It was from Bethlehem, the House of Bread. It was a hasty, foolish wandering from a happy home. We will not call every journey a wandering. It depends upon whence we came and whither we go, and under whose direction we move. Jonah wandered. When God sent him to Nineveh he fled to Tarshish. And God arrested him in the deep and brought him back. Manasseh wandered. And he was taken in the thorns and bound with fetters, till, in the day of his affliction, he sought the Lord and was forgiven. Demas wandered. From a love of this present world he forsook his Master and returned no more. Judas wandered. And how fearful was his end when he went to his own place! This is the wandering of which we have to speak. It is a wandering from God, from His Spirit, from His Word, from His Church. Whosoever goes astray from God voluntarily leaves the salvation which has been provided for him, and makes it his condemnation that he has loved darkness rather than light, because his ways are evil. But there are many wanderers from God in a very peculiar sense. They go from the very midst of His family, from Bethlehem itself, where Jesus is. They were born in His Church. They were

early dedicated to Him in His holy sacrament. They were taught His Word, and named and registered among the number of His covenant people. They might have lived always at His feet and in His favour. But they left Bethlehem in rebellious discontent. V. *WHITHER DID THESE ISRAELITES WANDER?* "To the country of Moab"; to a land of idolatry; a land of open licentiousness and crime. What a change of condition to them! What though bread was abundant there! "Fulness of bread like that in Sodom!" Man does not live by bread alone. And who that truly loved God would not rather live with a famine in Bethlehem than with sinful abundance in Moab? They went to Moab, but only "to sojourn there." Just as Lot went to sojourn in Sodom. Just as every wanderer from God goes into the world. It is but for recreation. It is only a harmless indulgence. It is but for a season of enjoyment. They mean some time to return and never to go back to Moab again. To die in Moab, without God and without hope! Nothing is further from their thoughts than this. They will only dip in the lake, like the swallow, and they shall feel refreshed for a longer flight. Ah, how little they know of the dangers they encounter! VI. *AND WHAT WERE THE RESULTS OF THEIR WANDERING?* What could they be but wasting sorrow and death? Ah, how sad are the results of a life of guilt! How mournful are the consequences of a wandering from God! (*S. H. Tyng, D.D.*) *Spiritual advantages sacrificed to worldly gain*:—Were they wise in taking this step? For some reasons they were wise. There was an abundance in the land of Moab, and a scarcity in the land of Judah. Worldly prudence, then, seemed to point out some other spot as their dwelling-place. But one thing they did not sufficiently consider—they were leaving behind them many of their religious advantages. Yes, there is no doubt that Elimelech was wrong, very wrong, in leaving the land of Judah with his family, and settling in the godless country of Moab. It is a fearful thing to set little store by our religious advantages and blessings, when God has given them to us. When, for instance, a person chooses a new home, how apt he is to reckon how far he will be a gainer in a worldly point of view, putting aside altogether his gain or loss in spiritual things! How sad, if he should grow richer for this life, but poorer for eternity! Again, when a servant chooses a fresh situation, is he not apt to measure the goodness of it by the wages he is to receive, instead of thinking seriously how far his soul is likely to prosper in his new home? (*Bp. Ozenden.*) *Cowardly emigration*:—Emigration from one's own land can only be justified when it becomes an inevitable thing—where the population abounds more than the means of maintenance, and the people require to be thinned by the emigration of some for the comfort and advantage of all. But when people leave their country in the day of its difficulties, and thus refuse their help, they play the part of cowards who desert the army when the tide of battle rolls against its standards—they act undutifully before God, unworthily as patriots, and cruelly as human beings. Our best exertions at such a crisis are always due; and instead of flinching from a sphere in which any good is possible to us, we ought to show that duty calls us wherever we can be of service. (*J. Cumming, D.D.*) *The godly oppressed, while the wicked have abundance*:—This may seem a strange thing, that the godly should be oppressed with famine, when worldlings and heathen wallow in their wealth. Of these David speaketh (*Psa. xvii. 14, xxxvi. 15, lxxiii. 4, 12*). The like you may hear in *Job (xxi. 7)*. But of the righteous it is said that they often cry out of their afflictions, their sorrows and nakedness, their hunger and misery; yea, our Saviour Christ pronounces Himself in His members, poor, hungry, naked. Judge now between the outward estate of the godly and the wicked; are they not contrary? That which of the world is condemned is of the Lord commended. Yet be not terrified from godliness, but rather strengthened in your profession. Then will you say, "Tell us the cause of this inequality?" Our Saviour answers (*John xv. 19, xvi. 20*). He compares us to the fruitful vine, which doth not only abide frost, snow, storm, and heat, but also at the gathering time is broken off, that the grapes may be reached. The gold must be tried in the furnace, the silver fined in the fire, the wheat purged in the floor, and, before it be meat for man, must also be ground in the mill; so must we be proved in affliction, fined in persecution, and crushed in pieces, under the burden of our own miseries, that we may be made prepared bread for the Lord's own spending. Why, then, doth the Lord make such large promises to His Church of plenty, seeing it endures continual poverty? I answer, the Church of God must be considered after two sorts: the first, as it is cleansed in the blood of Christ, and washed pure from all outward and notorious offences, unto which estate pertain all these outward promises of liberality in the Scriptures. The second

is the declined estate, or corrupted condition of every one in the Church, even unto the world's end: unto this pertain all the punishments and tribulations which the godly endure, which the Lord sends upon them that He may by little and little scour us from our transgressions and weary us with the miseries of this life, that we may the more earnestly desire the life to come, for the Lord doth here scourge us that we should not be condemned with the world. (*E. Topsell.*) *Moab doomed*:—Moab was a doomed country. More than a hundred years before Ruth's birth its sentence had been pronounced through the mouth of the prophet Balaam: "There shall come a Star out of Jacob; and a Sceptre shall arise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab." "The earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burned up." (*C. F. Hall.*) *Elimelech an exile*:—In the "Field of Moab," that is the upland canton bounded by the Amon on the north, the mountains on the east, and the Dead Sea precipices on the west, people lived very much as they did about Bethlehem, only more safely and in greater comfort. But the worship was of Chemosh, and Elimelech must soon have discovered how great a difference that made in thought and social custom and in the feeling of men toward himself and his family. The rites of the god of Moab included festivals in which humanity was disgraced. Standing apart from these he must have found his prosperity hindered, for Chemosh was lord in everything. An alien who had come for his own advantage, yet refused the national customs, would be scorned at least, if not persecuted. Life in Moab became an exile, the Bethlehemites saw that hardship in their own land would have been as easy to endure as the disdain of the heathen and constant temptation to vile conformity. (*R. A. Watson, M.A.*)

Ver. 3. Elimelech, Naomi's husband died.—*The death of Elimelech*:—He went first from Israel, the land of the living, and led them thence, and so he now goeth out of the world before them. I. **DEATH IS THE END OF ALL, AND IT SPARETH NONE** (*Josh. xxiii. 14; Job xxi. 33; Eccles. vi. 6, vii. 2; 1 Cor. xv. 51; Heb. ix. 27.*) II. **A FULL SUPPLY OF BODILY WANTS CANNOT PREVENT DEATH.** The man must die in Moab, where was food enough; the rich glutton must die also, and the rich man with his barn full. III. **WHERE MEN THINK TO PRESERVE LIFE, THERE THEY MAY LOSE IT,** as Elimelech doth here, fleeing from the famine in Israel, yet died where plenty was, in Moab; for no place is free from death, and when the time appointed is come, man cannot pass it (*Job xiv. 5.*) (*R. Bernard.*) *Elimelech's departure and death*:—I. **THE CAUSE OF HIS DEPARTURE.** "There was a famine in the land." Famine cometh from God. It was threatened in the Mosaic law, as a punishment from Heaven for disobedience and sin (*Lev. xxvi. 18–20*). See how many arrows Jehovah hath in His quiver! In how many ways He can wither our comforts—blast our enjoyments. See how dependent we are upon Him. If famine and its calamitous consequences be occasioned by sin, let us be thankful to God that they are not inflicted upon us. We cannot deny that our sins are great and numerous, considering the precious advantages we enjoy. Still God loadeth us daily with His benefits. "He hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities." Let us learn to be thankful. Let us flee to the Redeemer's Cross for pardon, on account of our past forgetfulness of God. If famine and its accompanying horrors were experienced so frequently in the land of promise, we may gather that we cannot be free from adversities in any station or in any portion of the earth. When we are encompassed by difficulties—when we are ready to wish that we were in the situation of some of our neighbours, did we but know how bitter the ingredients which the hand of Providence not unfrequently puts into their cups, we should murmur less at our own crosses, and endure with a more extirpated mind our own tribulations. Let us learn, then, to be satisfied with the station which Providence has assigned us, and seek for relief under the trials which are inseparable from it, in the holy Word of God. Religion is the only effectual soother of human woe. It does not, indeed, remove miseries from those who are under its hallowing dominion, but it mixes the sweet with the bitter, so as to render the burden supportable. By directing the eye of the troubled Christian to that heavenly Benefactor who was suspended for him on the Cross, and thereby opened for him a way to the realms of unending blessedness, it deprives the trials of this temporary scene of much of their bitterness, and imparts new energy to the sinking soul. Again, if the sore effects of famine were felt in Canaan, while there was abundance in Moab—if Israelites suffered want, when Egyptians, and Philistines, and Moabites suffered it not—the possession of many earthly comforts is no evidence of spiritual safety, no sure sign of Divine favour and love. The only heaven which the despisers of the Saviour

shall enjoy lies on this side the tomb; therefore they often receive more of the blessings of Providence than the heirs of glory. II. **WHITHER ELIMELECH DIRECTED HIS COURSE** when he departed from Canaan. By this conduct this man evinced too great a regard for terrestrial bliss, and too little for that which is heavenly. He slighted Divine ordinances and the privileges of the Lord's sanctuary. The grace of God has, indeed, enabled His servants to keep their garments clean in the midst of the greatest pollutions, as Joseph in Egypt and Obadiah in the household of wicked Ahab; still it is oftener the case, under such circumstances, that the Christian suffers more of evil than he imparts of good. "The companion of fools shall be destroyed." "Lead us not into temptation." If intercourse with the ungodly be so replete with danger, let us carefully avoid it. III. **WHAT BECAME OF ELIMELECH IN HIS NEW DWELLING-PLACE?** "And Elimelech Naomi's husband died, and she was left, and her two sons." We are not informed how soon he died; but that he finished his life shortly after his settlement there is clear from his death happening before that of his two sons, who lived only ten years after their arrival in Moab. How short the period he escaped from the pressure of famine in the land of his nativity! And if he had greater abundance of earthly comforts in his new habitation, how quickly were they all taken from him! If he had remained in the land of religious advantages, he would not have had to sustain adversities and hardships there long. Rather than resort to unlawful, or even questionable, measures, to get rid of our troubles, we ought to implore aid from heaven, that we may "endure" the "chastening" of the Lord—that we may bear the afflictions which His providence allots to us with patience and humility—being fully persuaded that our heavenly Parent doeth all things well—and likewise with earnest supplications for the accompanying influences of the Divine Spirit, by which they become greatly instrumental in meetening our souls for the habitations of the blessed. Learn: 1. That adversities and troubles should not be allowed to weigh too heavily on our minds. 2. That we should be very moderate in our estimation of, and desire for, earthly blessings. (*John Hughes.*) *Out of one sorrow into another*:—The end of one sorrow is the beginning of another, like the drops of rain distilling from the top of a house, when one is gone another follows; like a ship upon the sea, being on the top of one wave, is presently cast down to the foot of another; like the seed which being spread by the sower is haunted by the fowls, being green and past their reach is endangered by frost and snow, being past the winter's hurt, by beasts in summer, being ripe is cut with the sickle, threshed with the flail, purged in the floor, ground in the mill, baked in the oven, chewed in the teeth, and consumed in the stomach. This made David say (Psa. xxxiv. 13). But be not discouraged, for through many afflictions must we enter into the kingdom of heaven, and by affliction we are made like the Son of God. (*E. Topsell.*) **She was left, and her two sons.**—*Comfort in bereavement*:—I. **THAT ALBEIT DEATH IS DUE TO ALL, YET IT SEIZETH NOT UPON ALL AT ONCE; BUT ONE DIETH NOW AND ANOTHER HEREAFTER.** But God will have mankind upon earth till the last day; He forbearth some, and reprieveth them for their amendment; for the lengthening of life is for our further repentance. II. **THAT THE LORD, IN AFFLIC- TING HIS CHILDREN, SWEETENETH THE SAME WITH SOME COMFORTS.** He wholly leaveth not them without some taste of His mercy and goodness, as we may see in His dealing with Naomi. He took away her husband, and left her two sons, and after took them away, but gave her an excellent daughter-in-law. If we look upon the affliction, let us also consider what cause of comfort we have; mark when, for what, how long or short, what it is allayed with, that we be not wholly cast down. (*R. Bernard.*)

Ver. 4. They took them wives of the women of Moab.—*Sinful marriages*:—The sin of these young men in marrying strange women is not expressly denounced as a sin in the story, although it is denounced in the Targum, which commences verse 4 thus: "They transgressed the commandment of the Lord, and took foreign wives from among the daughters of Moab." But no one can read the Old Testament without feeling that they sinned against the law, for to the Hebrews marriage was a religious covenant; and St. Paul does but utter an admitted and familiar truth when he asks, "What fellowship has light with darkness, or Belial with God?" The reason of the law is given in the passage just cited from Deuteronomy—"they will turn away thy children from Me, and they will serve false gods." The daughters of Moab were specially obnoxious to the faithful Israelites. They appear to have been among the most fascinating, and the most wanton and profligate, women of antiquity. Their gods—Chemosh, Moloch, Baal-peor—were incarnations of lust and cruelty. They demanded human sacrifices. Children were cast into

their burning arms. In their ritual sensuality was accounted piety. True, Mahlon and Chilion were exceptionally fortunate in their wives. They were not turned to the service of false gods, though there was grave reason to fear that they might be; but, on the other hand, neither did they turn their wives to the service of the only true God. It was not till after her husband's death that Ruth learned to take shelter under the wings of the Lord God of Israel (chap. ii. 12); and Orpah, as we are expressly told (chap. i. 15), "went back to her people and her gods." (*S. Cox, D.D.*)

In the country of Moab:—It is wonderful how soon and how easily one gets used to a change of circumstances when the change itself is brought about gradually. The country of Moab, into which Elimelech and his family had journeyed, had of course its own language, its own fashions, and its own religion too, and these were as dissimilar as possible from those of the country which they had just now left. Yet the new-comers were in no serious sense shocked by what they saw and heard—had they so been they would have retraced their steps without delay; but each day brought its own novelty, and they managed to accustom themselves to the new things of to-day before it became necessary to face those of the morrow. Looking calmly at our fashion of living and way of acting now, some of us are compelled to admit how much we have changed in recent years; we never guessed that the alteration was so great or so complete; we never meant to have come so far. Worst of all, we never thought we should have felt the change so little. We remember well the qualms of conscience by which we were troubled when first we commenced to wander: we recollect now how the protests of our heart became fainter and fainter day by day until they ceased to be anything more than a hardly audible whisper. We went to sojourn in the country of Moab: we came into the country of Moab, and continued there. To begin with, our intentions were purely selfish, as selfish as were those of Lot when he elected to pitch his tent toward Sodom. We were going to get what we could out of Moab; they who lived there had something that we coveted, and we determined to make them share it with us. And, moreover, we had no serious intention of giving Moab anything in return. It is, indeed, just possible that at one time we may have possessed the Quixotic idea of remodelling life in Moab to suit our own ideas, but if so we soon abandoned the idea; for on the one hand we found that Moab was not willing to be remodelled—indeed, when we faintly suggested something of the kind, they said to us, as Sodom had said to Lot, and with not a little point, "Stand back; this one came in to sojourn, and he will needs be a judge"; and on the other hand, our own opinions were neither sufficiently clear in our own minds nor dear to our own hearts to enable us to graft them upon others. We were somewhat surprised, it may be, and a little pained, at the way in which our new neighbours received our well-meant attempts, in the early days of our life in Moab, to bring before them the advantages of a life of obedience and surrender to God. "If Bethlehem was such a charming place, and the life there so delightful, why did you exchange it for our country?" they not unnaturally inquired; "if Bethlehem did not satisfy you, how can you suppose that it will satisfy us?" Nor may we forget that in leaving the land of promise the wanderer never intends to be absent for other than a short period. If, on parting from our true home, any one had suggested that we should have been found in Moab to-day, we should have denied the imputation with indignation. Yet here we are still; and here in His great mercy the Good Shepherd has found us, and hence He desires to carry us home again—to our home and His. So they came into the country of Moab, and appear to have been received there with courtesy and hospitality. The world is always glad when those who have been making a somewhat definite profession of devotion to God show signs of a desire to relax the strictness of their behaviour; it is always willing to meet such persons more than half-way, and to do its best to enable them to quiet the still struggling conscience with as little delay as possible. If the world would only persecute us when it finds us on its own ground, there would be some hope that our stay in Moab would prove short indeed. Not that the world is any more prompted by unselfishness in its reception of us than were we ourselves in our journey to Moab; our new friends rejoice that, by our change of front, another protest against their way of life has died a natural death, and they are only too glad to be present and assist at its obsequies; they are, moreover, clear-sighted enough to see without being told that our surrender is a tacit victory for the world and indifferentism, and *pro tanto* a defeat for the gospel and a discredit to the life of faith in Christ. (*H. A. Hall, B.D.*)

Alternation of shadow and sunshine in life:—And thus the world moves on—deaths and marriages, marriages and

deaths. The household which to-day mourns as though all joy had taken flight for ever to-morrow resounds with the laughter of many voices at a new-born happiness. The faces all tear-stained yesterday are bright with smiles to-day. The bell which slowly tolled the funeral knell an hour ago now rings out the joyous wedding chime. So it must be, so it ought to be. Probably life would lose half its beauty but for this alternation of shadow and sunshine; at least, this we know, that human hearts need both the darkness and the light, or they will not grow to that perfection of truth and purity which God has designed they shall attain. Elimelech died, the sons married. It is a simple statement, yet a whole world of change is involved in it for that small household. (*W. Braden.*)

Ver. 5. Mahlon and Chilion died also both of them.—*Bereavement a blessing*:—What a melancholy collapse it all had been! For those so dear to her, death; for herself, solitude—the woman was left of her two sons and her husband. And yet what a marvellous blessing bereavement not only may be but often is. Surrounded by those who make up to us our world, we are slow to raise our eyes above or beyond them, or to realise that we have any need which they are incapable of supplying; but when they are taken from us, these beloved ones upon whom alone we have leaned and to whom alone we have been in the habit of looking for strength and consolation and advice, then it sometimes is that the soul looks up as she hears the Master calling her by name, and through her tears recognises for the first time the patient Lord who has ever been her truest friend. God would not have us love our dear ones one whit the less, but He would have us learn to put Him first and to trust Him implicitly about them no less than about ourselves. (*H. A. Hall, B.D.*) *Enormous trials*:—Observe—1. That many afflictions do attend the most gracious souls (*Psa. xxxiv. 19*). 2. Crosses seldom come single upon God's servants. 3. God did wonderfully support her in all these her great trials, and left her upon Scripture record as a pattern of patience unto all succeeding generations. (*C. Ness.*)

Ver. 6. She arose . . . that she might return.—*Homeward longings*:—Observe—1. God's house of worldly correction is to God's people a school of heavenly instruction. Naomi's crosses and losses she met with in Moab made her soul to sit loose from that cursed country, and to long for Canaan—that blessed land of promise. God's rod hath a voice (*Mic. vi. 9*), and now Naomi's ear was open to hear the instruction of it (*Job xxxvi. 8-10; Mic. ii. 10*). It is a rich mercy when affliction brings us from worse to better, from Moab to Canaan, further off from sin and nearer to God. 2. Godly souls should lead convincing lives. Such and so amiable was the conversation of godly Naomi in the eyes of those two daughters of Moab that it convinced them both—to love her and her people, and to go along with her out of their own native country unto her land. Plato saith, "If moral virtue could be beheld with mortal eyes, it would attract all hearts to be enamoured with it." How much more, then, would theological virtue or supernatural grace do so? 3. Every heart should hanker heavenward, as Naomi did homeward from Moab to Canaan. (*Ibid.*) *A woman of character*:—I. SHE RETAINED HER RELIGION—HER ALLEGIANCE TO THE ONE TRUE AND LIVING GOD—IN THE MIDST OF SURROUNDING IDOLATRY. II. SHE BELIEVED IN GOD EVEN IN THE MIDST OF ADVERSITY. III. SHE EXERCISED AN INFLUENCE FOR GOOD ON OTHERS. 1. On those who had known her intimately—her own household. 2. On those who had known her long—long enough to find out her true character. 3. On those who, according to all experience, are least easily influenced by one in her position—on her daughters-in-law. IV. SHE COULD DENY HERSELF FOR THE GOOD OF OTHERS. 1. It would have been an advantage to her to have these two strong, active young women with her to work for her in her old age. But a settlement would be easier for them in their own land than in Judah. So she bade them return, and was willing to go home alone. 2. She rose, too, above that petty jealousy which might have been excused in one so circumstanced, and wished them that provision which was the best security for rest and honour for a woman: "rest each of them in the house of her husband." Naomi's religion was no mere surface thing. It had become a part of herself. It had informed her character. It saved her from the corruptions of idolatry, from despair, and it enabled her to exercise a beneficent power over those who knew her best. What imperfect religion could do for her the sublime faith of Christ can do for all. (*Joseph Ogle.*) *The awakening*:—To trace the course of the wanderer away from God is sad and painful. The result of misery and regret is always the same; whether he ever return

to God or not his sorrow over the remembrance of his wandering will be equally sure. We must never hesitate, therefore, in proclaiming to all the wanderers from God, "You will find no rest in Moab." But I am not now to trace this course of sin to its dreadful result. There is for some a day of awakening in the present life. And, painful as this day may be, it is still a happy day. It is the beginning of a new life, a happy life, a life of glory. It is the dawning of a light which is prepared as the morning. It is the blessed visitation of the grace and goodness of God to the lost and guilty. We must never forget that this awakening of the soul is the work of God. Idolatry and enmity to God reign throughout the land of Moab. There Naomi dwells. There, if God permitted, Naomi would die. There, if God did not arrest and arouse him, the sinner would perish. To leave him in prosperity in this condition is to leave him to hopeless destruction. God speaks unto him in his prosperity, and he says, "I will not hear." This is his manner from his youth. Then God sends awakening providences. Afflictions and losses are multiplied. The nest is broken up. The soul is made sorrowful. Thus it was with Naomi. Her husband died. Her two sons are taken away. How many of His children have been saved by the bitter remedy of affliction, and have thus been taught to bless the chastenings of the Lord! But why should you make affliction necessary to your soul's salvation? Let the goodness of the Lord lead you to repentance. Let His love awaken your gratitude. But whether affliction or joy be made the instrument to awaken the soul, it is equally a Divine instrument. Welcome it, do not resist it, but cultivate it as a priceless gift. Now God means to bless you indeed. Listen to His voice with gladness. In this day of awakening, Naomi found that she had gained nothing by her wandering from God. There had been a famine in Judah. But ah, she had found a far worse famine in Moab. There every comfort had failed and every hope had departed. In no single point was her condition improved by her flight from Israel. But was this peculiar to her? Can you ever gain in such a course? Are you ever the happier for transgression, or made the more contented by forgetting your Creator? Far enough from all this is your actual experience. Your awakened mind looks back upon life, to say, with distress, "I have sinned, and what hath it profited me?" There is not a single real pleasure, or joy, or gain in life, of which any man can truly say, "This, at least, is the reward of my sin." Even if you never truly repent, your retrospect of life will be just as unsatisfying and destitute of comfort to your soul. You will despise all that you have gained. You will despise yourself for pursuing vanities so madly. And nothing will remain to you as the result but the most overwhelming despair. How much you have lost! You have thrown away the favour of God. You have sacrificed your peace of conscience. You have lost your early readiness to receive religious impressions. But good news from the Lord's land comes to this awakened wanderer. "Naomi heard in the country of Moab how that the Lord had visited His people in giving them bread." What precious intelligence does the gospel bring to the guilty! It declares the pardoning love of God. It proclaims complete atonement in the blood of Jesus. It announces full salvation in His merits and death. It exhibits God reconciled to those who have rebelled against Him. The message comes to you. Receive it. Rejoice in it. It is a message from God to each of you. Then the awakened wanderer sets out at once on a return. Naomi "arose, that she might return from the country of Moab; wherefore she went forth out of the place where she was, on the way to return into the land of Judah." Yes—the very first thing, when your mind is awakened, and you see and feel your guilt, is to go back. Many think they must first feel much, and mourn much, and suffer much, before they can hope to go back in peace to God. But why? Will your suffering save you? Will your multiplied tears add anything to a Saviour's worth? Is your dwelling on fire? And must you wait until you are scorched with the flames before you can escape in safety? Have you mistaken your road in journeying? And can you recover your lost steps the better by delay or hesitation or fruitless grief? Nay. You want all the time for actual pursuit. You have none to waste. Turn! turn! fly! fly! 'Tis madness to defer. Naomi goes to no other part of Moab, to no other land of idolatry. She goes directly back to the land of Judah. This is a blessed example. How many go from one broken cistern to another! But all these efforts are vain. Edom or Babylon are no better than Moab. No. You must fly to Bethlehem at once. Now is the accepted time. This is the day of your salvation. (*S. H. Tyng, D.D.*)

How that the Lord had visited His people in giving them bread.—*God's dealings with His people*:—I. GOD SEETH HIS PEOPLE IN ADVERSITY AND WANT, AND COMETH IN HIS DUE TIME TO HELP THEM (Exod. iii. 7, 8),

which is from His mere mercy and the stability of His love and promise to His people. II. GOD HATH EVER HAD MORE SPECIALLY A PEOPLE OF HIS OWN CALLED "HIS PEOPLE." This should make us to examine ourselves how we be God's people, whether according to creation or after the work of regeneration. III. CORPORAL FOOD AND THE NECESSARIES OF THIS LIFE ARE GOD'S GIFT (Lev. xxvi. 4, 5; Deut. xi. 14, 15; Hos. ii. 8, 9; Joel ii. 19). (R. Bernard.) *Good news from the far country*:—I. GOD WILL CERTAINLY REVIVE HIS PEOPLE WITH SOME GOOD NEWS FROM HEAVEN WHEN THEIR HEARTS ARE ALMOST DEAD WITHIN THEM UPON EARTH (Prov. xxv. 25). This cheered up her drooping spirit, that was almost dead within her by her manifold afflictions. This is one of God's methods, first to kill and then to make alive (1 Sam. ii. 6; Psa. xvi. 10, xviii. 16, xc. 3); the good news God sent concerning the weal of Zion to His people as they sat weeping by the waters of Babylon (Psa. cxxxvii. 1, 2) was a little reviving to them in their bondage (Ezra ix. 8); and when His people were humbled He then granted them some deliverance (2 Chron. xii. 7). Heaven is called a far country (Matt. xxv. 14); good news from thence brought in by the Holy Spirit. Oh, how welcome should that be to us and how unspeakably comfortable! (1 Pet. i. 8). II. GOD HATH HIS VISITING TIMES AND SEASONS IN RELATION TO HIS OWN PEOPLE. 1. Sometimes God visits their sins (Jer. xiv. 10), and then He fulfils His word of threatening evil against them. This is called God's visiting in His anger (Job xxxv. 15), but He retains not His anger for ever (Psa. lvii. 11). 2. He sometimes also visits in mercy (2 Sam. xxiv. 16). This is that visit which David begs, "Oh visit me with Thy salvation" (Psa. cvi. 4). III. GRACE AND BOUNTY FOLLOW WANT AND PENURY THROUGH DIVINE GOODNESS TO HIS PEOPLE. After a long scarcity (of ten years) God visits them with plenty. This holds true both in the temporal and spiritual famine (Amos viii. 11). (C. Ness.) *Naomi's undying faith and loyalty to Israel's God*:—During all those ten years of absence, Naomi had maintained in undiminished strength her attachment to the service and worship of the true God. "Among innumerable incorrupt she stood," like Abdiel in the midst of fallen angels, or like Noah in the midst of a revolted world. There must have been root and reality about her religion to make it thus evergreen and perennial. So have we sometimes seen in the Arabian desert a solitary palm fed by a fountain, and glassing its beauty and abundance in that from which it derived all its verdure and life. How many persons are there whose religion could not endure the test of an ordeal a hundred times less severe than this! It is a thing of mere outward imitation and reflection. Withdraw them from the midst of favouring external influences, and their superficial piety will speedily vanish away like the morning dew. Like the vase that has been electrotyped so as to resemble silver, a little tear and wear brings into view the inferior metal which forms its real material. Carey used to complain bitterly, in his days, that the Christianity of many who came out of England to India did not survive a sea voyage. It was all gone before they had "doubled the Cape." In like manner, the Sabbath-keeping and the church-attendance of multitudes have undergone sad decadence during a few months of residence in Berlin or Paris. And yet the degree in which our secret devotion and our Christian habits can live and flourish in the midst of unfriendly influences and when dependent on inward support alone, is the true test of the reality and strength of our religion. Naomi had nobly stood this test, and had thus proved herself to be "an Israelite indeed." (A. Thomson, D.D.)

Ver. 7. *Her two daughters-in-law with her.—The promising commencement.* Here we have the most happy and promising commencement of a new work. We see them all set out together upon the same road and apparently for the same result. No one who saw them set out upon their journey could anticipate that they would voluntarily separate, or imagine that one was more likely than the other to reach the end proposed. We are obliged to wait until succeeding trials shall bring their real characters individually to light before we can discriminate between them. By a great variety of means God stirs up sinful men to seek after Himself. Anxious, excited, apparently earnest and sincere, they set out upon their journey back to the gracious Being whom they have so long neglected. Yes; they really set out, and appear to set out sincerely. I do not mean that such persons feel their need and danger: that they meditate sincerely upon their return to God; that they resolve they will go back. No. I mean that they actually begin their journey. The prodigal not only says, "I will arise and go to my father"; he does arise and go. The wise and foolish virgins both take their lamps and go forth to meet the bridegroom. Thus all go together "on the way to return into the land of Judah." As

far as this journey lies still within the limits of Moab, so far they may unite to go. Up to a certain point they must take the same path and travel in the same direction. Ah, how many of these young travellers have I seen! The Church delighted over them. Christian friends were encouraged by them. The brightest and most blessed hopes clustered around them. The Lord only, who knoweth the hearts of the children of men, could have told us which were the Orpahs and which were the Ruths of this hopeful company. His judgment at the last separates the precious from the vile, divides the gold from the dross, and assigns to each his own place. But we must follow our travellers in their journey, and see why and where they separate. As we thus follow them we see them meet with many trials of faith and patience on the road. Your former habits of sin are to be renounced. But, in addition to these, new habits of conduct and feeling are to be acquired. The habit of secret prayer in your closet and chamber; the habit of constant, earnest study of the Word of God; the habit of watchfulness over your easily-besetting sins; the habit of caution in your allowed indulgences; the habit of consideration and discernment in your relations and company; the habit of resistance to your inward propensities to evil; and, above all, the habit of constant remembrance of God your Saviour, and of simple, earnest faith in His presence, protection, and help; all these, if I should mention no more, are to be acquired, cultivated, and maintained. If all this could be done by single effort, it would be easy work. But that is impossible. It is a journey of successive steps, of continued progress; and you have to press forward in it with the utmost determination and the most sincere desire. But above all these habits of outward life, you have to come with the deep sense of sin, with a consciousness that you are condemned and destitute, with an entire refusal to trust in any virtue or excellence of your own, and to cast yourself in an affectionate and simple trust at your Saviour's feet. When you come to serve the Lord, you must prepare your soul for temptation. From the day you set out on your heavenly journey discouragements and difficulties will seem to multiply around you. The world will be arrayed against you. The habits, opinions, and plans of worldly people are constant obstacles in your way. The professed Christians around you are often fearful obstacles in the way. You see those who profess to follow Christ in many instances living just as gaily, as extravagantly, as indulgently, often as sinfully, as if they had made no such profession. Your own inward heart and feelings will often be very discouraging to you. There is such backwardness in prayer; such want of deep interest in the Word and service of God; so little sensible enjoyment often in your new path; such a necessity for constant warfare and constant watchfulness within yourself. If you relax a moment, you fall. Ah, these are great discouragements, great trials to your faith and patience. Nothing can endure through them but a heart that really loves Jesus more than all the world, and a spirit that willingly sacrifices itself for His service and glory. If this is your heart and spirit, then all these discouragements are instruments of new strength. Orpah may feel dispirited and weary. Ruth only loves the more, the more she is tried. To Orpah the way grows more unattractive and tedious as she goes on. To Ruth every step brings new determination and new desire to press on even to the end. (*S. H. Tyng, D.D.*)

Ver. 8. The Lord deal kindly with you.—*Naomi's prayer for her daughters-in-law :*

—I. THAT IT IS A DUTY TO PRAY FOR THOSE WHICH DO EITHER US OR OURS GOOD. II. THAT AT PARTING FRIENDS ARE TO PRAY ONE FOR ANOTHER, as we may see the practice of it in Isaac (Gen. xxviii. 1, 3); Laban (Gen. xxxi. 55); Jacob (Gen. xliii. 14); and in Paul (Acts xx. 36). III. THAT THE GODLY ARE PERSUADED THAT THE LORD IS A MERCIFUL REWARDER OF THE DUTIES OF LOVE WHICH ONE DOETH TOWARDS ANOTHER (Col. iii. 24). IV. THAT CHILDREN SHOULD SO WELL DESERVE OF PARENTS, yea, though but parents-in-law, as THEY MAY BE MOVED HEARTILY TO PRAY FOR THEM, as Naomi doth in this place. A good carriage is a duty towards all, then much more to parents; and the prayers of parents is a means to put a blessing upon their children. V. THAT GOD WILL NOT ONLY BARELY REWARD, BUT SO DEAL WITH US AS WE DEAL WITH OTHERS. (*R. Bernard.*) *The benedictions of life*:—The key-note of all I have to say is in that word "kindly." The argument is this. We can understand kindness in the sphere of the human, and rise from that to a prayer for the Divine kindness. No society in any age can be cemented together by force alone. Feudalism, for instance, in olden times, was not all terror. The baron could command his dependents in time of war, as he fed and housed and clothed them in times of peace; but, as the old

chroniclers tell us, there was often a rare hospitality, a hearty cheerfulness, a chivalrous affection in the somewhat stern relationship. I. *THE LORD KNOWS BEST WHAT KINDNESS IS.* The Lord deal kindly with you. Has He been kind? At times we should have been tempted to answer, No! The vine is blighted, the fig-tree withered, the locusts have spoiled the green of spring. Kindly? Yes, we shall answer one time when we stand in our lot at the end of days. For kindness is not indulgence. God's kindness to us may take forms which surprise us. At the heart of His severest judgments there is mercy, in the bitter spring there is healing water. The kindest things God has ever done for us have been, perhaps, the strangest and severest. So it was with Daniel and Jacob and Joseph and Abraham, our father. All God's ways are done in truth, and truth is always kindness. II. *THE LORD KNOWS BEST WHAT OTHERS HAVE BEEN TO US.* "As you have dealt with the dead and me." It is a touching little sentence. The dead. So silent now. Never to come back, for us to touch imperfectness into riper good. Gone! What a word of vacancy, and silence, and subtle mystery! Is it strange we should wish well to those who were kind to the dead? And Naomi links her own being with them still: "The dead and me." And with true hearts they never can be dissociated. Anniversaries of remembrance make our separations no more distant. They soften them. They give place for comforting remembrances: but the dead are near as ever. "The dead and me!" Who shall separate? None. Christ died, yea, rather is risen again, and He will raise us up together to the heavenly places. III. *THE LORD ALONE WILL BE WITH US ALL THROUGH OUR FUTURE PILGRIMAGE.* Apart from Divine power, which we have not to bless with, there is Divine presence which we all need. Christ will be with us to the end. Never will come a battle, a temptation, a solitude, a sorrow, a needful sacrifice, but the Lord will be at hand. IV. *THE LORD HAS GIVEN US GUARANTEES OF HIS KINDNESS.* We are not left to meditate on rain and fruitful seasons only. Not the green of spring, nor the south wind of summer, nor the gold of autumn alone proclaim His goodness. (*W. M. Statham.*) *As ye have dealt with the dead, and with me.—Kindness to the departed.*—Let us inquire how many things a dying godly man leaves behind him in this world. His soul is sent before him (Rev. xiv. 13). He leaveth behind him—I. His BODY, to which we must be kind, by burial and lamentation. II. His ESTATE, to which we must be kind, by careful and faithful administration. III. His CHILDREN, FRIENDS, OR KINDRED, to whom we must be kind, by love and affection. IV. His FAULTS AND FAILINGS, to which we must be kind, by silence and suppression. V. His MEMORY AND VIRTUES, to which we must be kind, by congratulation, commemoration, and imitation. (*T. Fuller, B.D.*) *Behaviour in the light of death:*—You know not, husbands and wives, how long you may dwell together. Death may soon come, and will doubtless, sooner or later, come and tear away the one of you from the other. When that event shall take place, how will you wish to have behaved? Behave at present as you would then wish to have behaved, for then you will not be able to bring back the present time. Many great miracles have been wrought by the power of God, but it never did, nor ever will, recall the time that is past. How comfortable was it to Orpah and Ruth to hear Naomi say, "Ye have dealt kindly with the dead!" And how comfortable was the reflection to them through life that she had reason to give them this commendation! (*G. Lawson.*) *Showing kindness to the dead:*—It was much to be able to say this, when we consider how difficult the discharge of the duties of law-relationship often is, and how apt it is to be judged with suspicion and severity even when it is well done. The fact has been noticed long ago in the pages of many a Greek and Roman satirist. But Naomi was not aware, when she spoke this generous tribute, how very much their conduct had been the result of her own. She had won the confidence and veneration of their young hearts by her unselfishness, her forbearance, her charitable judgments, her holy consistency, and her discretion. We often make for ourselves the beds we are to lie upon, and we may be certain that there would be more Ruths in the world if there were more Naomis. But how blessed when it can thus be said of us, that "we have dealt kindly with the dead"! We should make it our habitual and earnest aim so to behave ourselves towards our kindred that, should we be called to stand beside their open graves, this would be the testimony of others and of our own consciences. But we must not forget that there is an important sense in which we may prove our undying love for the dead by our kindness to the living. Those two young widows expressed their affection for their departed husbands by their thoughtful attentions to Naomi. They loved her for her own sake, but they loved her doubly for their sakes. Religion, indeed, warrants us to

think of our friends beyond the grave as still living, though absent. David's nobly generous spirit rejoiced that he could still reach his departed Jonathan in lavishing respect and kindness upon Jonathan's only surviving son, Mephibosheth. And this sentiment reaches its highest possible point of sublimity, and becomes, as it were, transfigured, when we show kindness to another because he belongs to Christ. In this way we can still reach Him in His members, and anoint His blessed feet with our precious ointment and wash them with our tears. That poor sufferer whom you relieved by your benefactions and soothed by your sympathy was a disguised Christ. Even the cup of cold water given to a disciple in the name of a disciple is to be remembered by Him on another day. (*A. Thomson, D.D.*)

Ver. 9. The Lord grant you that ye may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband.—*The rest of marriage*:—1. Man's Maker is the chief maker of all men and women's marriages in the world. It is the work of God to provide an helpmeet for man, hence it is called the covenant of God (Prov. ii. 17), and therefore honourable to all (Heb. xiii. 4). Religious Naomi looks up here unto God, saying in effect, "The Lord grant you good husbands." Grace should be sought for, in the first place, in those seven qualifications of good matches and marriages: grace, race, face, arts, parts, portion, proportion. 2. A married state is a state of rest. So it is called here and chap. iii. 1. Hence marriage is called the port or haven of young people, whose affections while unmarried are continually floating and tossed to and fro like a ship upon the waters, till they come into this happy harbour. There is a natural propension in most persons towards nuptial communion, as all created beings have a natural tendency to their proper centre, and are restless out of it. (*C. Ness.*) *Rest in marriage*:—If it is to be wished that wives may find rest in the houses of their husbands, it must be the duty of husbands to do what they can to procure them rest, not only by endeavouring to provide for them what is necessary for their subsistence and comfortable accommodation, but by such a kind behaviour as will promote their satisfaction and comfort. Men and women may have affluence without rest, and rest without affluence. But let women also contribute to procure rest for themselves by frugality, by industry, by such behaviour to their husbands as will merit constant returns of kindness. (*G. Lawson.*)

Ver. 10. Surely we will return with thee.—*Promises and purposes*:—I. PROMISES OF SPEECH AND PURPOSES OF HEART, WHETHER TO GOD, TO HIS CHURCH, OR TO INDIVIDUALS, OUGHT TO GO HAND IN HAND. If a man's word does not express his meaning and bind him, nothing can. II. PROMISES AND PURPOSES OFTEN PROCEED FROM PASSION INSTEAD OF PRINCIPLE. III. PROMISES AND PURPOSES PROCEEDING MERELY FROM PASSION SOON FALL TO THE GROUND. "I go, sir," one said in the Gospels, and "went not." Some persons melting under the ministry of the Word as a summer brook (Job vi. 15-20). A changed heart necessary to perseverance. Saul may have religious fits, and Jehu much zeal; for want of a regenerated nature both come to nothing. (*John Macgowan.*) *Promise and purpose to be allied*:—1. Promises of speech and purposes of spirit should walk hand in hand together. None ought to promise with their mouths what they do not purpose with their hearts; this is to be fraudulent and deceitful, which is destructive to human society. God's children are all such as will not lie (Isa. lxiii. 8), to say and unsay, or to say one thing and think another, to blow hot and cold with one blast. Ye that have promised to give up yourselves to Christ, and to go with Him in ways of holiness, it must be your purpose to depart from iniquity (2 Tim. ii. 19; Rev. xiv. 4; Hos. ii. 7). 2. Promises of the mouth, yea, and purposes of the mind, do oft proceed from passion, and not from principle. So did Orpah's here; it was only a pang of passion which the discreet matron prudently distrusts, and therefore tries them both with powerful dissuaves. Thus Saul in a passion promised fairly to David (1 Sam. xxiv. 16, 17, and xxvi. 21), and David discovered all those fair promises to proceed more from sudden passion than from fixed principles; therefore did he distrust both his talk and his tears. Hereupon David gets him up into the hold, well knowing there was little hold to be taken at such passionate promises and protestations (1 Sam. xxiv. 22). Yea, and out of the land too, as not daring to trust his reconciliation in passion and strong conviction without any true conversion (1 Sam. xxvi. 25, and xxvii. 1, 2, 4), otherwise his malice had been restless and he faithless. 3. Purposes and promises that proceed from passion, and not from principle, do soon dwindle away into nothing. Thus did Orpah's (ver. 14), who said with that son in the parable (Matt. xx: 30), "I go, sir"; yea, but when, sir? So here, it is certain we will return with thee,

was enough uncertain. It is a maxim, second thoughts are better than first, but Orpah's first were better than her second; her purposes and promises do dwindle away and vanish into smoke. (*C. Ness.*) *The failure of good impulses*:—The bright morning does not always shine into the perfect day; the sweetest spring-bud of promise does not always ripen into precious fruit. The seed that was cast on stony ground grew rapidly up, but withered in a moment. Orpah's decision was the decision of impulsive feeling, of filial affection; it was strong suddenly, it grew up in an instant, and in an instant it perished; and she resolved to forsake Ruth and Naomi, and return to her gods, her people, and her country. (*J. Cumming.*)

Vers. 11–13. It grieveth me much for your sakes that the hand of the Lord is gone out against me.—*Naomi's parting address*:—This is a great aggravation of the afflictions of many parents, that their children are involved with themselves. They could bear poverty, they could bear reproach, they could bear death itself, had they none who depended on them for bread and for respectability in the world. God has the same right to rule over the fruit of our bodies as over ourselves, and to allot to them their share of the good or the bad things of this world. It is bitterest of all, when we have reason to think that our sins have provoked God to punish us in the persons of our friends, or to inflict those strokes which our friends must feel as heavily as ourselves. Let us beware of ever exposing ourselves to such heart-piercing reflections by conduct that may bring down God's displeasure upon our families. God's people may sometimes, without good reason, think that the hand of the Lord is gone forth against them, in the calamities which befall their families or friends. Our afflictions are hard enough to be borne by us, without the addition of groundless reflections against ourselves. At the same time, the error is much more common of insensibility to the Divine displeasure, when it has been really kindled by our sins, than of vexing ourselves with unjust suspicions of God's anger. There is one thing that still remains to be considered concerning this parting speech of Naomi to her daughters-in-law. Why did she dissuade them from going with her to the land of Judah, where the true God was well known, and persuade them to return to a country of abominable idolaters? We are not bound to justify all that Naomi spake or did. But, in charity to that good woman, we ought to believe that, for years past, she had been endeavouring, by her practice and her converse, to recommend to her young friends the worship of the God of Israel. If they were truly turned from the error of their ways, nothing that is here said was likely to drive them back to their own country. They might have been disgusted even with Naomi's own conduct, if she had not fairly told them what inconveniences they were to encounter in going to her land, and to her people. Our Lord very plainly told His followers what they were to expect in His service. "The foxes have holes," &c. We may, however, observe, that Christ usually administered proper antidotes against the fears which the doctrine of the Cross might excite in the minds of His hearers. It may be doubted whether Naomi, in the dejection of her spirits, did not overlook the powerful consolations which might have encouraged her young friends to follow her into the land of Israel, and would have more than compensated all the inconveniences to which they would have been exposed in a strange land. Doubtless she had often spoken of those privileges to them in former times; but as yet they had not learned their nature, and perhaps Naomi now despaired of ever being able to give them a perfect idea of it. (*G. Lawson.*)

Ver. 14. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law; but Ruth clave unto her.—*Orpah's defection*:—I. **WORLDLY RESPECTS ARE GREAT HINDRANCES IN THE COURSE OF GODLINESS.** The world keepeth from the entertaining of the truth (*Matt. xxii. 5*); it hindereth in the receiving of it. II. **AN UNSOUND HEART MAY FOR A TIME MAKE A FAIR SHOW IN THE WAY TO CANAAN, BUT YET TURN BACK AT THE LAST,** as Orpah doth here. And this is by reason, first, of certain motions of religion, which maketh them in general to approve of the same; holding this, that it is a good thing to be religious, and that none can find fault with a man for that. Further, the working of the Word, moving the heart in some sort to entertain it. And, lastly, the desire of praise and good esteem with men: these will make hollow hearts to set on a while to heavenward, but shall not be able to enter. III. **SUCH AS WANT SOUNDNESS TOWARDS GOD FOR RELIGION MAY YET HAVE OTHERWISE COMMENDABLE PARTS IN THEM.** For Orpah is commended for a kind wife, as well as Ruth by Naomi, and for a kind daughter-in-law (*ver. 8*); and she showed good humanity in going on the way with her mother-in-law, yea, a good natural affection in weeping so at parting.

(*R. Bernard.*) *Orpah* ; or, *the mere professor* :—An onlooker not able to discover the difference between Orpah and Ruth so far. The crisis has come. Both had made professions (ver. 10). Here the difference is made apparent. I. WE LEARN THAT IT IS POSSIBLE TO GO A LONG WAY TOWARDS CHRISTIANITY AND YET NOT TO BE A CHRISTIAN. To be born, educated, and dwell in Christian households, these are great blessings, but do not constitute or make a Christian. It will not do to be almost, we must be altogether, decided for Christ. The cup that is almost sound will not hold water. The ship that is almost whole will not weather the storm. Feelings, sentiment, profession are all good if they spring from a living faith in Jesus Christ ; without this they are worse than worthless. II. WE LEARN THAT IT IS POSSIBLE TO DECEIVE OURSELVES, AND TO THINK THAT ALL IS RIGHT WHEN IN TRUTH ALL IS WRONG WITH OUR SOULS. Hardly possible that Orpah played the conscious hypocrite. She meant what she did when she became a proselyte—did not deliberately act a part. Feeling and sentiment (love for her husband) blinded her eyes. Love to God, which she had thought supreme in her heart, subordinate to the love of Moab. This often so with men ; they are not hypocrites, they are self-deceivers. Education, circumstances, the force of influences around them, produce an emotional religion which they mistake for vital godliness. They hear with joy like the “stony-ground hearers.” III. WE LEARN THAT OUR RELIGION WILL NOT PROFIT US AT ALL UNLESS IT BE CHARACTERISED BY PERSEVERANCE TO THE END. Improvement : Is our profession a mere profession or the fruit of a living faith ? Brought by circumstances to the boundary-line between life and death, have we stopped there ? The Bible full of such instances. Felix trembled ; Balaam prophesied ; Herod heard gladly ; Judas sat at the sacramental table with our Lord ! Whatever we do, we must not stop short of conversion ; if we do, we perish. (*Aubrey C. Price, B.A.*) *A good word for Orpah* :—The others did not greatly blame her, and we, for our part, may not reproach her. It is unnecessary to suppose that in returning to her kinsfolk and settling down to the tasks that offered in her mother's house she was guilty of despising truth and love and renouncing the best. We may reasonably imagine her henceforth bearing witness for a higher morality, and affirming the goodness of the Hebrew religion among her friends and acquaintances. Ruth goes where affection and duty lead her ; but for Orpah too it may be claimed that in love and duty she goes back. She is not one who says, “Moab has done nothing for me ; Moab has no claim upon me ; I am free to leave my country ; I am under no debt to my people.” We shall not take her as a type of selfishness, worldliness, or backsliding, this Moabite woman. Let us rather believe that she knew of those at home who needed the help she could give, and that with the thought of least hazard to herself mingled one of the duty she owed to others. (*R. A. Watson, M.A.*)

Ver. 15. *Thy sister-in-law is gone back unto her people, and unto her gods.—Backsliding* :—1. The backslidings of such as set out fair, and do begin well, is a sore temptation to young converts and proselytes. It was no less to the very disciples themselves (John vi. 66, 67). Thus it was also an occasion of stumbling unto the primitive Christians to behold the backslidings of two such forward professors as Hymenæus and Philetus had been ; insomuch that the apostle saith to them, “Nevertheless the foundation” (of God's election) “standeth sure ; the Lord knoweth them that are His,” &c. As the multitude of sinners cannot give any patronage to the evil ways of sin, so neither can the paucity of saints put any disgrace or disparagement upon the good ways of God. 2. Some forward followers of the only true and living God may apostatise from thence to embrace the vanities of the Gentiles. 3. That love to the ways and worship of God is a sincere love which doth undergo trials and temptations, yet bears up against all : godly Ruth rides out the storm against wind and tide of both the sister's pattern and the mother's precept. (*C. Ness.*) *The painful separation* :—Nothing can be more encouraging to the Christian heart than to see the young setting out to seek the Lord. It is a beautiful exercise and exhibition of youth. Never do the morning hours appear so bright or so promising. We cannot suspect the sincerity of any, and therefore we encourage them to press forward. We have seen these youthful travellers going with Naomi out of the place where they dwelt, on the way to return unto the land of Judah. For a time they travel together happily and affectionately. There is a line which divides Moab from Judah. This is a painful but an inevitable crisis. The two sisters must separate. There is just such a line in our soul's history where a similar entire separation must take place. The awakened mind sees its own sinful

ness and need, acknowledges the darkness and emptiness of the Moab in which it has dwelt, and truly feels the importance of those blessed offers which the gospel proclaims. The Holy Spirit has taught the sinner the guiltiness and wretchedness of his past life. He knows, he sees, he feels the truth. But he does not love the truth. He does not embrace and choose it for his own, his portion for ever. If he would really do this, all would be well. His heart he cannot, will not, give to Christ. Anything else he will do. But nothing else will avail him anything. Poor Orpah! How often have I seen young travellers to eternity stopping just where you stop; hesitating just where you hesitate. Nothing more can be done for you where you are. There is Moab. You have tried that, and found it empty and unhappy. There is Judah. All its provisions and offers are before you, and brought for your acceptance. Never will you be sorry if you take your portion there. Here are Naomi and Ruth. They are journeying to the land which the Lord hath promised them. Soon they will be far from you, out of your sight. Then you will mourn over the separation which you foolishly made. You may go back to Moab, and bury yourself in its sins and follies. But you will find no peace or happiness there. Your conscience will never again allow you to rest. Orpah goes "back to her people and her gods." This is a most important fact in her history. She does not, cannot remain where they part. That is a place most unnatural and unattractive. No; she goes back, while Ruth and Naomi go forward. The separation grows wider every hour. This is a most affecting illustration. The awakened and convinced mind can never abide at the line where a Saviour is refused. There is no permanency in such a state of mind. There is no home for the soul there. You go back. It may be to self-indulgence, dissipation, and sensual delights. It may be to giddiness, frivolity, and empty, cheerless mirth. It may be to business, covetousness, and unceasing occupation. It may be to infidelity and assumed unbelief and argument. It may be to open hostility and persecution of the gospel, and those who love it. It may be to absolute and dreadful hardness of heart. But to whatever it shall be, you still go back. The worst opposers of the gospel we ever meet are those who once were almost Christians. But you say you will hereafter return to Christ. You cannot do this but by His own Spirit. And that Spirit you have driven far from you. There is a spring that returneth in creation when the winter has gone. But you have buried the sacred seed of your soul's welfare beneath a winter which knows no coming spring. You will mourn at the last, when your flesh and your body are consumed. But it will be with a worldly sorrow which worketh death, and not with a godly sorrow which worketh repentance unto salvation. This is the fearful prospect in your return with Orpah. (*S. H. Tyng, D.D.*) *Orpah*.—I. ORPAH WAS A MOABITISH WOMAN—had been married to one of the sons of Elimelech—and was now a widow. She had been brought up amid the absurdities and impurities and superstitions of idolatry. But her connection with an Israelitish family was a great advantage to her, and ought to have been improved by her, to the benefit of her soul, and deemed a peculiar privilege and blessing. Oh, then, let us associate with those who live for another world—whose spirit and words and conduct diffuse the savour of heaven, and are calculated to keep God and eternity in our minds. II. ORPAH POSSESSED MANY NATURAL EXCELLENCES, which made her lovely and amiable, though still lacking that new heart and that devotedness to God without which no man can be saved. 1. Orpah acted well in the character of a wife. 2. Orpah conducted herself with kindness and tenderness and affection towards her mother-in-law, Naomi, also. 3. Another valuable feature, which we cannot view but with great interest, in the character of Orpah, was her intention to accompany Naomi to the land of Judah. It is well to see hopeful beginnings—to see the careless aroused, the indifferent in some degree alarmed about their sins, and paying more attention than before to the welfare of their souls. It is well to see the profane putting on the decencies of morality, and renouncing their vile habits and pursuits. It is well, we say, to see these hopeful signs. But, alas! they often disappoint our fondest hopes. III. ORPAH'S FATAL DEFICIENCY. She only began her march to Canaan—her resolution failed—she persevered not, but returned to her own land! Naomi wished not to prevent either Ruth or Orpah from accompanying her to Canaan, but from doing so for her sake. She had no earthly inducement to hold out to them. If they came, she wished them to come from religious considerations alone. If we take up the cause of God from any but spiritual motives—if we attach ourselves to the cause and people of God from earthly views, our religion is hateful in heaven. The "loaves and fishes" are to have nothing to do with our pursuit of Christ, but the attractions of

His grace—the privilege of serving Him, and a supreme desire to be His—His alone—His for ever. 1. Orpah forsook the cause of God—she returned to her people. Their maxims and their habits, after all, were more congenial with her mind. Woe awaits those who are kept from “following the Lord fully” from regard to earthly connections and associates. 2. Orpah forsook the cause of God with great reluctance. Agrippa-like, she was almost persuaded to go with her to the land of Judah, yet, though with many misgivings, she retraced her steps to her own country, and saw her no more. Now, with the view of inducing these wavering characters, who are thus daily withstanding the convictions of their own minds—who return to Moab, but with many tears—to hasten out of their present condition, we beg to say a few words concerning their danger. It is a great mercy to have our minds in the smallest degree impressed with Divine things, and awakened to the importance of the things which accompany salvation. It is a mercy to be made to feel some measure of anxiety about our never-dying souls and their everlasting welfare. It is the Holy Ghost striving with us, and bidding us to consider our peril while yet it may be avoided. With the view of urging these characters to a speedy determination to be altogether on the Lord’s side, we beg to add a few remarks likewise concerning their present folly. When man neglects to follow the admonitions of his conscience, he deprives himself of all comfort. He cannot enjoy inward tranquillity in this state. There is something within him constantly telling him that his end cannot be desirable if a radical spiritual change does not take place in him. He cannot have real joy in this condition. If your religion resembles that of Orpah, give God no rest till the weight of your transgression drives you to the Saviour, and a believing view of His matchless love constrains you to devote your persons and your talents to His service and glory. (*John Hughes.*) *Orpah and Ruth*:—

I. FAMILY SORROWS. 1. Want. 2. Separation. 3. Death. II. FAMILY ERRORS. 1. Preference of worldly comfort before religious privileges. 2. Formation of worldly connections. III. FAMILY ATTACHMENTS. 1. Their power. The amiableness of Naomi has so attached these idolaters to her that they are willing to forsake even their own mother. 2. Their weakness. The case of Orpah may teach us that an attachment to religious people is not religion; nor can it, of itself, produce religion in the heart. IV. FAMILY MERCIES. 1. The return of moderate prosperity. 2. Converting grace bestowed upon an idolater. (*Homilist.*) *The danger of religious indifference*:—A family perished, not long ago, by a fire in their own house. They were not consumed by the flames, but suffocated by the smoke. No blaze was visible at all, nor could any alarming sign of fire be discovered from the street, and yet death came as effectually upon them as if they had been burned to ashes. Thus is sin fatal in its consequences, few being destroyed by outrageous forms of it, flaming up with lurid glare, but multitudes perishing by the stifling smoke of indifference and spiritual slumber. (*J. H. Norton.*) *Unto her people, and unto her gods*:—When Christian set out from the City of Destruction, he too, for a short part of his journey, was attended by two companions: the first indeed, Obstinate, only went with him in order to try and bring him back to what he considered wiser courses, but the other, Pliable, was absolutely sincere in his desire to reach the Celestial City. “I intend to go along with this good man,” he said, “and to cast in my lot with him”; he might have availed himself of the words of sincerely-meant devotion in which Orpah joined with Ruth, and have declared, “Surely I will return with thee unto thy people.” Yet, as we know, when the pilgrims, “being heedless,” fell into the Slough of Despondency, poor Pliable, his virtuous intentions notwithstanding, “gave a desperate struggle or two, and got out of the mire, on that side of the Slough which was next to his own house. So away he went, and Christian saw him no more.” There are one or two particulars in which the behaviour of Orpah was not unlike that of well-meaning Pliable. To begin with, there can be no question but that she had a sincere affection and regard for Naomi, and would genuinely have liked to spend the remainder of her days in her society; but the attachment was purely personal, and in all such friendships there is a breaking point, a limit to the extent to which others are prepared to follow us. For it is only us whom they are following, and our path may lead us into circumstances more trying than they are prepared to undergo whose hearts are not buoyed up by the hope which animates our own. Another somewhat sad reflection respecting the history of Orpah springs from the fact that she actually started for the better land, and indeed went some considerable way on the journey. The thought of those fellow-travellers of ours who set out so cheerily with us and yet failed after all to persevere is one of the saddest that comes

into our memory when we review our pilgrimage. We call to mind their fervour, their enthusiasm, their kindly interest; we shall never forget how our heart sank within us when they announced their intention of turning back. And in the case of Orpah our feelings are the more regretful because we bear in mind that she was full of the best possible resolutions of going further still. "Surely," she said, no less earnestly than did Ruth herself, "Surely we will return with thee unto thy people." But, as we have already noticed, the desire in her mind was to be, as she put it, "with thee"; it was the personal element in her relation to Naomi which, however charming in itself, constituted the weakness of her position—it was on this rock that her frail vessel was wrecked at last. Further, if Orpah's decision pains us, can we remain unmoved at Orpah's tears? She is quite clear in her own mind that she can go no further; she will leave no inconsiderable portion of her heart behind her when she says farewell to Naomi; she lifted up her voice and wept; she lifted up her voice and wept again. Alas for the impotence of tears! The question for each to ask himself is not, What have I felt? but, What have I done? Orpah loved Naomi dearly, and wept bitterly at the prospect of parting from her, but returned to her people and her gods nevertheless. And here we must pause to inquire how far Naomi was to blame for the failure of Orpah. We recognise the honesty with which the older woman points out to her companions the sacrifice which they will be called upon to make if they elect to go further with her. She must have known, she evidently did know, that by turning back Orpah was losing her reversionary interest in the property of her deceased husband, yet we do not find Naomi telling her of this. Warn people by all means that life in the kingdom of heaven is the life of a servant and a soldier, but tell them too that their entry into the kingdom has made them inheritors of a possession greater and more real than anything than the world can offer, and which it would be the most fearful madness to throw away. Love had brought Orpah a long way towards the land of Judah: might not a little affectionate entreaty have brought her further still? It is important that before passing away from the story of Orpah we should try to realise what it was that she lost by turning back. And with the inheritance, redeemed as it was by Boaz, Orpah had also lost the honour—Ruth's chiefest glory in the ages yet to come—of being the ancestress of David and of the Messiah. Of all the promises to Abraham, that upon which in all probability the patriarch set the greatest store was God's pledge that in him all the nations of the world should be blessed. To be an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven is in itself a marvel of grace, the true meaning of which we shall never fully know here, but to have it in one's power to bring redemption within the reach of others, surely this is an infinitely greater marvel still. God offers us salvation as the satisfaction of the needs of our own heart; but He also offers it to us in order that we may be qualified as the possessors of it to work with Him in plucking from the burning those who are the bondsmen of Satan and of sin. What answer shall we give to Him that speaketh? (*H. A. Hall, B.D.*) *The parting-place:*—Where was it that Orpah parted from her companions? She went with them some way, possibly a great way, but at last they reached a point in the journey which was geographically, so to speak, one of decision, one beyond which no one could pass without committing herself to new things and a new life, and at this point Orpah made up her mind to return. What more likely than that this point was the river itself, which if they adopted the southern route would form the boundary between Moab and the land of Judah? The river flows still, and each pilgrim has to make up his mind whether or not he shall cross it. There, then, flows the river: shall we cross? Sometimes it seems to us to be the river of surrender. Can I give myself wholly and unreservedly to God? and can I give up, or consent to His taking from me, whatever is contrary to His will and therefore to my happiness, love it as I may? Sometimes the river is one of confession. We have travelled thus far without our life or our relation to the world being appreciably affected or altered, and God, who is infinitely tender in His dealing with the returning soul, often postpones the necessity of or the occasion for a definite confession of our allegiance to Him until we are strong enough to make it. Yet sooner or later the river has to be crossed, and the more definitely the confession is made the better it always is for the soul. And sometimes the river is that of a consistent life. "I would not shrink from throwing in my lot with that of the people of God," says many an one, "if I could only hope to lead a consistent life: I will make no profession unless I can carry it out, and I fail to see how under my circumstances that can be possible." Certainly God requires that those who follow Him shall follow

Him fully, as Caleb did, but God asks no one to lead the life of faith in his own strength or trusting to his own resources. A new life lies before you; but to enable you to live it, God offers you new strength. (*Ibid.*)

Vers. 16, 17. **Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return.**—*Ruth and Naomi*:—I. EVERY PERSON IS TESTED. Sooner or later, but certainly. The tests will vary in severity with the cases. In every case they will be conclusive, determining the genuineness of the life professed. They cannot be evaded. If one is for Christ, he will continue with Him. The test of God cannot be too severe. The true follower cannot be driven away. To the strongest appeals he replies: "Lord, to whom shall I go?" II. WHEN TESTED, AN ORPAH WILL GO BACK. Why should she leave so much for so little? Naomi was only her mother-in-law. There was her own mother standing and beckoning in the doorway of the old home. She was not only leaving home and country, she was leaving her God. With much depth of feeling, there was not depth enough to bind her heart. III. A RUTH, WHEN TESTED, GOES ON. What is the difference between her and Orpah, leading to this different conduct? 1. Her devotion to Naomi. She was less impulsive, perhaps, than her sister, but hers was a love which bore testing. The Greeks and Latins, among their fine discriminations, distinguished between the emotional love of feeling and the intelligent love of choice. Orpah's love was the former; that of Ruth was the love of choice. It grew out of careful reflection. It was a deep, undying attachment. 2. The religious foundation of her conduct. This is a trait, if not wholly wanting in her sister, too weak for any mention—a trait beside which Ruth's exceeding love is wholly secondary. Ruth had chosen her mother's God. 3. Her resolute exercise of will. She was moved by Naomi's appeals. She thought anew of what she was leaving. She heard tender voices calling her, of the living, of the dead: "Come back, come back." Her heart began to yield. When Orpah returned, she could scarcely resist the impulse to go with her. Then "she strengthened herself." She summoned her soul. She put forth a supreme exercise of will. IV. RUTH RECEIVED HER REWARD. She became an ancestress of the world's Redeemer. (*Sermons by the Monday Club.*) *Ruth's choice*:—All the elements of a true choice of God are here described. 1. It involves the surrender of a false belief. This quiet scene may be placed beside that on Carmel. Ruth's decision is mightier in its gentleness than Israel's in its terror. In manner the two are as unlike as the dawn to the earthquake; in results as the clear ray of a planet to the flash of a meteor. In essence they are the same. Our false god has no repulsive name, such as Baal or Chemosh; its real title is self, its worship sin, its wages death. It must be surrendered. 2. True choice of God involves sacrifice. To start out with Naomi meant not pleasantness, but bitterness. Ruth followed, as she thought, to loneliness, homelessness, perpetual widowhood; against the desire of those she left, without the wish of those to whom she was going; ready to work, to beg, to die if need be, for the one who stood to her as representing God. To-day, Canaan in the Church welcomes even Moab to its circle. Earthly advantages are largely on its side. But a cross seems to wait somewhere in the way, if only that sore surrender of pride and pleasure and will which prompt the soul's real refusal. 3. God sends help to a right choice. Providences both of joy and of sorrow; attractions and repulsions of heart; subtle influences of companionship; favour and famine; marriage and mourning; our life is one long plea for Him. 4. A decision is forced. Somewhere in the way comes a test. On either side example, desire, promise; we must hold to the one and forsake the other. 5. Right decision has its great rewards. What Ruth feared proved only unsuspected blessings. Losing her life, she found it. Bishop Hall exclaims: "Oh, the sure and beautiful payment of the Almighty! Who ever forsook the Moab of this world for the true Israel, and did not at length rejoice in the change?" (*Charles M. Southgate.*) *Conduct of Orpah and Ruth contrasted*:—It is the difference between feeling and principle in religion, between emotion and consecration, kissing and cleaving. I. EMOTION HAS ITS LARGE APPOINTED PLACE IN LIFE. It is the colour and fragrance of the soul's world. It gives both impulse and reward to action. Emotion has great play in religion. God appeals to it. The character of God is so presented as to excite our emotions. We tremble at His awfulness, adore His greatness. The story of Christ's life and death has power to move us beyond all else. The insensible heart is usually a selfish heart. But—II. EMOTION WILL NOT TAKE THE PLACE OF CONSECRATION. Here distinguish between sensuous and spiritual impressions. There is a peace, a rapture,

which the Spirit breathes into the believing soul, the promised manifestation of Christ to him "that hath My commandments and keepeth them." This is the reward of obedience, not its substitute; is not of nature, but of grace. No degree of feeling about religious things is religion. Natural fondness toward God, as toward parents, may be the mere delight of an emotional nature, a snare to the soul and an affront to Him. What joy to Christ that eyes which overflow for a novel or a play should moisten at the story of Calvary? There is need of searchings of heart and stings of conscience in unsuspected places. Orpah and Ruth feel alike, love alike, but part for ever at the test of following. III. THE TRUE OFFICE OF EMOTION IS TO DRAW TO CONSECRATION. Feeling is for the sake of following. The Church has still no realm of mightier influence than a consecrated home. The heaviest condemnation of many in the day of judgment will be that they resisted the influences and withstood the prayers of a godly home. IV. CHOOSING GOD IS PROVED BY CHOOSING GOD'S PEOPLE. The world estimates our relation to Christ by our relation to His followers. Yet it often seems as if men must be twice converted, first to Christ, and again to His Church. Do not let this woman's devotion shame us. She gave up, literally, all her world for God. True devotion to Christ turns to His Church with Ruth's matchless consecration. (*Ibid.*) *Ruth; or, decision for God*:—1. An impulsive religion is not always real religion; nay, is very often the reverse. Better, far better, to be quiet and undemonstrative like Ruth, and to have the root of the matter in us, than to be impulsive and demonstrative like Orpah, and in the hour of trial to fail. A straw will show in what direction the stream is flowing. Ask yourself, "How do I act in little things? Is self habitually postponed to God? And this because the Lord is my joy?" 2. The importance of (nay, the necessity for) an entire surrender of ourselves to God, if we would be Christians indeed. Let us ask ourselves, "Is it thus with me and the Saviour? Have I thus taken Christ to be mine? Do I thus cleave to Him? Is He supreme in my affections?" 3. The choice which we have been considering must be made with the full determination to abide by it, come weal or come woe, for ever. (*Aubrey C. Price, B.A.*) *Ruth's trial and decision*:—It must have been a severe trial to Ruth's constancy when she beheld her sister-in-law, who had probably been the companion of her youth and the friend of her early widowhood, turning away back to Moab and its idol-gods and leaving her alone with Naomi; for we are greatly influenced for good or for evil by sympathy and numbers. And had her steadfastness now depended on her human relations and affections alone, and had her heart not stricken down and rooted itself in something that was Divine, she would in all likelihood have returned after her sister-in-law. When one flower in a garden is pulled up, it loosens the hold of all the other flowers near it, unless they are much more deeply rooted. And Naomi's words seemed to give a voice to this temptation: "Behold, thy sister-in-law has gone back unto her people, and unto her gods: return thou after thy sister-in-law." This was like giving an increased momentum to the stroke, or feathering the arrow and driving it to its mark. But let us not misunderstand the venerable woman in her yearning interest and disguised love. There was a hidden harmony between her treatment of Ruth and the rule to deal gently with young converts as you would do with the early spring blossom or with the new-born child. But she dreaded a choice made from mere temporary impulse or secondary motives. The cable that is to connect the ship with the anchor needs to be tested in every strand or link. One weak point makes all weak, and may be the occasion of death to thousands. Suppose Ruth to go on to Bethlehem-judah, to be brought face to face with the stern realities of penury, and then to regret her choice and to steal away back to Moab, would not the most sacred interests suffer the most? Here, then, was her "valley of decision." Naomi had anticipated the maxim, "Try before you trust"; but she was equally ready to obey the other part of it, "Trust after you have tried." (*A. Thomson, D.D.*) *Whither thou goest, I will go; . . . thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.*—*Ruth: Mind, its purposes and powers*:—1. That private families are as much under the providence of God as the houses of kings. 2. That whilst religion does not secure from the ordinary trials of life, it does secure their being overruled for good. 3. That a devout committal of our being to God in His providence will never fail of its reward. In the text we have—I. A DELIBERATE RESOLUTION FOR THE TRUE. 1. The true in society. 2. The true in worship. II. A SOCIAL INFLUENCE FOR THE TRUE. 1. Naomi represented her country, and her people, and her God, to Ruth. 2. The representation which Naomi gave was most attractive. (1) Every man's

conduct is a reflection both of his companions and his God. (2) Heathens are able to identify our companions and our God. (3) We may give such a view of both as will draw them into our circle. III. AN INVINCIBLE ENERGY FOR THE TIME. 1. This force triumphed over all old associations. 2. This force overcame all the pleadings of Naomi. 3. This force changed her social condition and her destiny. Away with the dogma that man is the creature of circumstances! The soul is a mariner that can so pilot her barque as to make the most hostile winds wait for her to the shores on which her heart is set. She is an eagle that can rise above the darkest thunder-cloud of circumstances, and bask in sunlight, whilst that cloud spends itself in wild tempests beneath her buoyant wing. (*Homilist.*) *Ruth's decision*:—I. THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF HER DECISION. II. THE EXTENT OF HER DECISION. It comprehends the sum of all her actions, and reaches to the utmost limit of her existence. Profession without principle is nothing. III. THE FELICITY OF HER DECISION. There is no substantial happiness apart from real religion. Application: 1. Are we Christians? Then we have each a soul to save—a God to serve. 2. Are we yet undecided? Ruth is our pattern. 3. Are we indifferent? Then we resemble Orpah, Ruth's sister-in-law. (*F. Ellaby, B.A.*) *The faithful choice*:—1. It was an humble choice. She has nothing to offer but herself. She affects not to bring anything which can make her of any worth. She pleads only for permission to be to Naomi in her future life all that affection and fidelity can make her. She has nothing else to offer. It matters not in what condition of life the child of earth was born, when the Holy Spirit brings her heart to Jesus she comes as a beggar. Parents and sisters may say she has been always the light and comfort of the household. They are ready to think she has never sinned. And yet she feels the burden of guilt, and weeps, and prays over the remembrance of her foolish, wasted life. The preciousness of the faithful saying, that Jesus came into the world to save sinners, is her only comfort. The assurance that the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost is her single encouragement and support. 2. It was an affectionate choice. Her heart is with Naomi. Her desires all reach forward to the land to which Naomi journeys, and thither, on whatever terms, she must and she will go. It is just such a choice to which the Saviour would lead you all. "My daughter, give Me thy heart," is His tender appeal to you. And our youthful, spiritual traveller freely and affectionately responds, "I give my heart to Thee; Thy face will I seek; hide not Thy face from me." Her choice is of the Saviour, because she really loves Him. Infinite attractions are gathered around Him. His service seems to her all that she can desire. 3. Ruth's choice was an entire one. There was no hesitation in her mind about the decision she should make. She manifested no remaining love for Moab, and no lingering desire to carry something of Moab with her. And it was this entire choice which made the happiness of her future course. She made the exchange, the transfer of herself, freely, completely, and without reserve. And there was nothing left to turn her back to Moab in her possible experience hereafter. When the choice of a Saviour is thus entire, how completely it opens the way for future duty! How it settles all future discussions and difficulties with a single decision! The secret of happiness in religion is just here. Making it the entire, single choice of the heart. The troubles and difficulties in the Saviour's service habitually arise from the vain attempt to serve two masters. 4. Ruth's choice was a determined choice. Lovely and gentle as she appears, and humbly and affectionately as she pleads, there was amazing dignity and firmness in her stand. Some of the most triumphant and remarkable deaths in the history of early martyrdom for Christ are of young and tender virgins who calmly and boldly endured every conceivable torture without a moment's faltering. "I am a Christian," was their gentle but firm reply to every solicitation to recant, until, worn out with suffering, they departed to be with Christ. You may never be called to the same sorrows. But you will be always summoned to the same decision. Jesus will always require from you the same unshrinking, determined choice. 5. Ruth's choice was an instant choice. She asked no time for consideration. Her mind was made up. Her decision was settled. She staggered not in unbelief, nor wavered amidst conflicting motives. Why should we ever hesitate a moment in our acceptance of the Saviour's offers? Surely when the Lord sets before us life and death, a blessing and a curse, and bids us choose for ourselves which we will have, we require no time for consideration. It has become a mere question of personal voluntary choice. This can never be settled but by our own personal decision and act. If it is to be settled, it must be finally, in a single moment of time. Why should that moment be delayed? Why should that frank and affec-

tionate choice be postponed? Make an instant choice. Say, "When Thou sayest, Seek ye My face, my heart replies, Thy face, Lord, will I seek." Why should any of you hesitate? All the arguments of truth, of interest, of duty, of happiness, are on one side. (*S. H. Tyng, D.D.*) *The noble choice*:—Five choices Ruth made, and five choices must we all make if we ever want to get to heaven. 1. In the first place, if we want to become Christians, we must, like Ruth in the text, choose the Christian's God—a loving God; a sympathetic God; a great hearted God; an all-encompassing God; a God who flings Himself on this world in a very abandonment of everlasting affection. 2. Again, if we want to be Christians, like Ruth in the text we must take the Christian's path. "Where thou goest, I will go," cried out the beautiful Moabitess to Naomi. Dangerous promise that. There were deserts to be crossed. There were jackals that came down through the wilderness. There were bandits. There was the Dead Sea. Naomi says: "Ruth, you must go back. You are too delicate to take this journey. You will give out in the first five miles. You have not the physical stamina, or the moral courage, to go with me." Ruth responds: "Mother, I am going, anyhow. If I stay in this land I will be overborne of the idolaters; if I go along with you I shall serve God. Give me that bundle. Let me carry it. I am going with you, mother, anyhow." 3. Again, if we want to become Christians, like Ruth in the text we must choose the Christian's habitation. "Where thou lodgest, will I lodge," cried Ruth to Naomi. She knew that wherever Naomi stopped, whether it were hovel or mansion, there would be a Christian home; and she wanted to be in it. 4. If we want to become Christians, like Ruth in the text we must choose Christian associations. "Thy people shall be my people!" cried out Ruth to Naomi. Oh, ye unconverted people, I know not how you can stand it down in that moping, saturnine worldly association. Come up into the sunlight of Christian society—those people for whom all things are working right now, and will work right for ever. I tell you that the sweetest japonicas grow in the Lord's garden; that the largest grapes are from the vineyards of Canaan; that the most sparkling floods break forth from the "Rock of Ages." Do not too much pity this Ruth of my text; for she is going to become joint-owner of the great harvest-fields of Boaz. 5. Once more, if we want to become Christians, we must, like Ruth in the text, choose the Christian's death and burial. She exclaimed: "Where thou diest will I die, and there will I be buried." I think we all, when leaving this world, would like to be surrounded by Christian influences. You would not like to have your dying pillow surrounded by caricaturists, and punsters, and wine-bibbers. How would you like to have John Leech come with his London pictorials, and Christopher North with his loose fun, and Tom Hood with his rhyming jokes, when you are dying? No, no! What we want is radiation in the last moment. Yes; Christian people on either side the bed, and Christian people at the foot of the bed, and Christian people to close my eyes, and Christian people to carry me out, and Christian people to look after those whom I leave behind, and Christian people to remember me a little while after I am gone. (*T. De Witt Talmage.*) *True-heartedness and the tests of true-heartedness*:—I. I observe that the conduct of Ruth assures us that THERE IS SUCH A THING AS TRUE-HEARTEDNESS, and thus teaches a lesson of trust in humanity. It reveals certain elements in humanity that are reliable. Much heartlessness, much frivolity and sin, will a wise and good man find as he goes about in the world, much to dissipate the rosy credulousness of his youth, and to sadden his philanthropy; but, on the other hand, something of his faith will be justified, and he will learn that, after all, there are elements in human nature worthy our trust and our love. As the chemist finds some admixture in what seemed to be a simple element, so, doubtless, at the bottom of the purest heart lurks some particle of self, some ingredient of our earthly composition. And if one is disposed to turn a magnifying-glass upon this, it will appear enormous; if he beholds it through the lens of a sad or a foul experience, it will look grimy or distorted; or, if with nothing more than his naked eye he has a mind to notice only the evil that exists among men, he can see plenty of it, and it will look badly enough. But it is an equally correct theory of human nature, and a much more agreeable one, which admits the conviction of some moral loyalty, extant even in the obscurest places, and maintained under all trials. II. But, having thus vindicated human nature as to the fact of true-heartedness, let us proceed to consider its tests. By what signs or expressions may we be assured of its presence? I reply that the very words of the text, the very ideas to which Ruth referred, afford a sufficient indication of these tests. For consider what these ideas, expressed in

the language of Ruth, really are. They are the ideas of home, country, God, and the end of our mortal life. And are there any ideas more vital than these? Surely, if one cherishes any sacred and true thoughts at all, they must cluster around these things. 1. Home, that has sheltered and nourished you, that encloses your most secret life, that claims the first flow of your affections and their last throb. 2. Country, that organism which links your individual being to a public interest, that gives you a share in history, a pride in great names, an influence in world-wide issues, and, as a second home, inspires you with a more comprehensive loyalty. 3. The grave, which bounds all earthly action, and limits every earthly condition, that realm where distinctions of home and country melt away, the bed where all must lie, "the relentless crucible" in which rags and splendour alike dissolve, the gateway to a stupendous mystery. 4. And God, the Infinite Being to whom the instincts of our souls respond, to whom in our highest consciousness we aspire, the Source and the Interpretation of all existence, the Light that comprehends our darkness, the Strength that sustains our weakness, the Presence to which in our guilt and our adoration we lift our cry, the Nature in which we live and move and have our being—these are great realities; and it appears to me that the words of Ruth are so eloquent, and her devotion seems so great, because of the greatness of the things she spoke of. Indeed, does not this ground of thought and action constitute a grand distinction of our humanity? If in many points man is closely linked to the brute, is he not largely separated by his thoughts concerning these things, and by his action upon them? Ascribe to the animal such affections, such faculties, such power of reasoning, as we may and as we must, surely no one will claim for him such conceptions as man entertains concerning home and country and God and the limitations of his earthly lot. These are manifestations of human nature which project beyond the sphere of mere animal life, and indicate a larger scope of being. They are marks of immortality. Start with any one of these ideas, and see to what it leads. For instance, the relationships of home—is there not an argument for immortality in these? Or start from the idea of country, and is not the same conclusion unfolded? The duties, the achievements, the historical problems, that pertain to nationality, do not they suggest it? And he upon whose mind dawns some apprehension of the Infinite, he who feels assured that he holds communion with the Eternal Spirit, and presses forward towards that perfect excellence, never completely to attain, but always capable of larger attainment—surely in essence he must be imperishable. And the grave itself, dark and silent as it is, to such a conscious soul cannot seem the final barrier of existence, but only the suggestive portal of new achievements. If, then, these great realities, of which Ruth spoke, are associated with all that is deepest and noblest in our humanity, he who proves faithful to even one of these ideas, who holds it as a sacred conviction, and cherishes it with a pure love, has in him the core of true-heartedness, the ground of a principle, and a possibility in which we may trust. And permit me to add that these tests are personal and practical, tests by which we may try not so much the true-heartedness of others, for which we may have very little function, but by which each may try his own. A man can hardly ask himself a more practical question than this: "What are my thoughts, and what is my conduct, respecting home, country, God, and the limitations of my mortal life?" III. I remark, finally, that these four ideas are not only the tests of personal true-heartedness—they also reveal THE GREAT BOND OF OUR COMMON HUMANITY. That which is common to men abides in the hearts of men, is linked with the great facts expressed in the text. They thus indicate the natural ground of human unity. And upon these ideas it is the tendency of Christianity to develop a still nobler unity. (E. H. Chapin, D.D.)

A good resolution:—I. A RESOLUTION TO PURSUE THE JOURNEY TO HEAVEN. 1. It is a narrow way. 2. It sometimes proves a way of affliction. 3. It is nevertheless a very pleasant way. II. A RESOLUTION TO BE SATISFIED WITH SPIRITUAL ENTERTAINMENTS. 1. The Christian finds a sweet entertainment in communion with his God—in praising Him, which is one of the most delightful exercises of the mind; and in prayer, which is so necessary for the renewing of his spiritual strength. 2. In the Word of God he finds a delightful repast. He is made wise unto salvation. 3. In the conversation of his fellow Christians, the believer finds delightful refreshing. 4. The believer finds also times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord when he takes up his abode in the house of God. He experiences the truth of the promise, "they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength."

III. A RESOLUTION TO CAST IN THE LOT WITH THE PEOPLE OF GOD. Before you make

a resolution so to do, count the cost, and consider the nature of the step which you propose to take. 1. The people of God have generally been a persecuted people. 2. The people of God are an afflicted people. 3. The people of God are a holy people. 4. We have said that the people of God are a persecuted and an afflicted people, but they are nevertheless a people of the best prospects, so that they are truly wise, and consult their own best interests, who cast in their lot among them.

IV. A RESOLUTION TO CHOOSE THE SERVICE OF GOD. When a sinner is truly converted from his sin he cleaves unto the Lord with purpose of heart. "Thy God shall be my God," is the resolution which he expresses to the Church of Christ; and in doing so—1. He resolves to cast away his idols. 2. He who makes this resolution receives God in Christ as his God—God in the person of the Mediator. 3. He who chooses God for his God resolves to devote himself to the active service of God.

V. A RESOLUTION TO BE FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH. What is necessary to faithfulness unto death? 1. Begin aright. 2. Persevere as you begin, for Christ is not only the Door but the Way. Often repair to the fountain of His blood for peace; constantly resort to His throne of grace for spiritual strength; often sit at the feet of Jesus to learn the mysteries of the kingdom of God. To conclude—1. We admire the constancy and perseverance of Ruth. 2. We learn from this passage of Scripture that we ought to be faithful to those who are inquiring the way to Zion with their faces thitherward. 3. The inquiring and anxious sinner should persevere whatever difficulties may present themselves. If the difficulties and trials of the way were tenfold, it would still be his interest as well as his duty to endure unto the end. (*Essex Remembrancer.*)

Ruth the true-hearted:—That strong and brave decision on the hills of her native Moab, where she resolves to cling to her aged and sorrow-stricken mother-in-law, reveals a character of no ordinary quality. There is in her what, for want of a better phrase, I must call depth of nature. Her character is rooted in a deep, rich soil of true humanity. A woman whose whole being is on the surface, who has no hidden deeps of feeling and thought and aspiration and love—a tree decked with showy blossoms, but never hung with golden fruit—is felt to be false to her true nature and Heaven-appointed mission. Ruth reveals to us a character nourished and strengthened from the unseen depths of an affluent nature which we love to associate with woman. The shallow woman exhibits no such heroism as that of Ruth. Here, too, we discover in her that most essential characteristic of a true woman—heart. She thinks and speaks and acts like one whose inspiring life-force is a heart aglow with the fires of feeling, throbbing with the pulsations of love and beneficence; and her whole outward life is but the spontaneous outflow of this full, fresh fountain within. A nature thus endowed and animated is rich in its own resources, and bestows its abundant benefactions upon all who come within its charmed sphere. The heart is the true regulator and benefactor of life. Sometimes neither art nor intellect predominates, but the throne which the heart should occupy is held by the ungracious goddess of Stoicism—a stolid form, which no prayer can move to sympathy, and from which no loving word ever proceeds. How desolate is the nature over which either of these three false powers presides! How impoverished is every life encompassed by the chilling atmosphere of such a nature! On the other hand, how enriched are all they who breathe the genial air which surrounds one with a nature like that of Ruth, in which the heart sits queen on her rightful throne, and dispenses her regal gifts to all. Hence the importance of true heart-culture in education. The neglect of this essential part of genuine culture, and the giving of exclusive attention to the intellect is one of the most perilous tendencies of this age. Such a process may produce a Lucretia Borgia in one sphere, and a George Eliot in another; but a Madame Guyon, a Mary Lyon, and an Elizabeth Fry will seldom or never come forth to bless mankind under its false reign. It is Madame De Staël who wisely says that "life is valuable only so far as it serves for the religious education of the heart." Let us note another feature in the character of Ruth. Devoted affection like that of this young Moabitess to her aged mother-in-law deserves our highest tribute. There is an utter unselfishness in this devotion that is beautiful to contemplate. A selfish, exacting, suspicious passion, misnamed love, is the curse of its possessor; a love pure and unselfish is the perpetual joy of the heart in which it glows, and of all who feel its Divine warmth. Orpah can speak loving words; Ruth can do heroic deeds. A selfish person cannot interpret unselfish love. Two hearts must be in happy accord to read the meaning of each aright. Blessed are they who can discern and feel true goodness. Blessed are those homes where true-hearted Ruths preside and Love reigns, goddess of the happy home circle. Yes, it

is heart-power, and not any other force, that is most impressive and most enduring even in this unappreciative world. Courage pays its devotion at the shrine of suffering love; physical force surrenders to the higher power of the heart. "Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, and myself founded empires; but upon what foundations did we rest the creations of our genius? Upon force. Jesus Christ alone founded His empire upon love, and at this hour millions of men would die for Him." We must rear monuments in human hearts, by true love and devotion to humanity, if we would live through succeeding ages. The crowning grace of Ruth's character, as it is that of every other human being, is her piety. Love to man is crowned and glorified by love to God. (*C. H. Payne, D.D.*) *True decision* :—We have just stood at the line which separates Moab from Judah. Orpah has gone. We shall trace her course no longer. We would gladly never see her example followed by others. We must now confine ourselves to the beautiful decision and faithful choice of Ruth. She stands before us a sincere youthful convert to the Lord's service. She has decided the question for her soul by gratefully accepting the offers of a Saviour's love. She sets out upon an untried journey alone. Naomi, indeed, is with her. And her heart is affectionately bound to her mother-in-law. But Ruth has many cares, trials, and remembrances of which Naomi is not conscious. To Naomi the journey is a well-known return. To Ruth every step is untried and new. She was born in Moab. She knows nothing of Judah. Thus is it with every youthful convert. The experienced and aged Christian has much acquaintance with the way in which you go. The new-born child of grace takes every step on ground unknown and untried. This is the way in which all must go who would walk with God. "This people shall dwell alone." Each one, be the multitude ever so great, is a hidden one with God. Multitudes may be travelling in the same direction, but the feelings and experience of each are solitary. Ruth must make her decision in her own secret heart, and make it for herself alone. Her earthly friends must all be left. They are in Moab, from whence she takes now her final departure. This separation is not to be made without a trial of her faith. The more affectionate she is in her real choice, the more she will feel the separation from those whom she leaves behind. Religion cannot destroy our earthly affections, our interest in those who are dear to us in natural ties. Nay, it much increases the warmth and power of our love. This decision may often meet with much opposition from those with whom you dwell. Your dearest earthly connections may oppose. They love you. But they do not love your religion. You must follow the Lord fully though you follow Him alone among your earthly connections; and He will make those who oppose at peace with you. Be faithful to Him, and your fidelity shall be the source of increased confidence and respect, even from the worldly who appear to reject and despise you. As we trace the history of Ruth, we find her meeting with new trials of her faith and decision after she sets out alone. Orpah has gone. But still Naomi proves the spirit of Ruth. Your sister has gone back to her people and her gods. If you mean ever to go back, now is your best time to go. Remember, I have nothing to offer you. If you go with me it must be to be a partner of my griefs and wants. Thus God often proves the young disciple with new trials. He sends His east wind upon the young trees of His planting; not to weaken or destroy, but to give greater strength and endurance for the time to come. Our real conversion to Him is an hour of peace and blessedness; but it is not an end of trial. Nay, it is the very beginning of new contests; and our fidelity in the decision we have made is to be proved at once, and to be proved constantly, by new dispensations of the will of God. Be really faithful and sincere, and God will prove your faith, to strengthen, settle, and establish you for ever. Be truly gold, and then the refiner's fire will only purify and make you bright. This faithful decision Ruth was obliged to make in the face of backsliding in others. She sees Orpah go back, yet she perseveres. When a child of the world comes out on the side of Christ, and pursues, in the midst of the evil examples of many, a course of simple, faithful devotion to the Saviour, how it honours His truth! How it strengthens His cause! How it impresses even those who oppose! How such faithfulness is owned and prospered by the Lord, to whom it is offered, in the usefulness to others of the life which is adorned by it. (*S. H. Tyng, D.D.*) *Ruth deciding for God* :—I. AFFECTION FOR THE GODLY SHOULD INFLUENCE US TO GODLINESS. Many forces combine to effect this. 1. There is the influence of companionship. 2. The influence of admiration. Let us therefore copy the saints. 3. The influence of instruction. When we learn from a teacher we are affected by him in many ways. Instruction is a kind of

formation. 4. The influence of reverence. Those who are older, wiser, and better than we are create in us a profound respect, and lead us to follow their example. 5. The influence of desire to cheer them. 6. The influence of fear of separation. It will be an awful thing to be eternally divided from the dear ones who seek our salvation. II. RESOLVES TO GODLINESS WILL BE TESTED. 1. By the poverty of the godly and their other trials. 2. By counting the cost. 3. By the drawing back of others. 4. By the duties involved in religion. Ruth must work in the fields. Some proud people will not submit to the rules of Christ's house, nor to the regulations which govern the daily lives of believers. 5. By the apparent coldness of believers. Naomi does not persuade her to keep with her, but the reverse. She was a prudent woman, and did not wish Ruth to come with her by persuasion, but by conviction. 6. By the silent sorrow of some Christians. Naomi said, "Call me not Naomi, but call me Bitterness." Persons of a sorrowful spirit there always will be; but this must not hinder us from following the Lord. III. SUCH GODLINESS MUST MAINLY LIE IN THE CHOICE OF GOD. 1. This is the believer's distinguishing possession: "Thy God shall be my God." 2. His great article of belief: "I believe in God." 3. His ruler and lawgiver: "Make me to go in the path of Thy commandments" (Psa. cxix. 38). 4. His instructor: "Teach me Thy way, O Lord" (Psa. xxviii. 2). 5. His trust and stay (see chap. ii. 12): "This God is our God for ever and ever, He will be our guide even unto death" (Psa. xlviii. 14). IV. BUT IT SHOULD INVOLVE THE CHOICE OF HIS PEOPLE: "Thy people shall be my people." They are ill spoken of by the other kingdom. Not all we could wish them to be. Not a people out of whom much is to be gained. But Jehovah is their God, and they are His people. Our eternal inheritance is part and parcel of theirs. Let us make deliberate, humble, firm, joyful, immediate choice for God and His saints; accepting their lodging in this world, and going with them whither they are going. (C. H. Spurgeon.) *The influence of friends*:—It is not improbable that Ruth was in heart a Jewess, and that, for reasons which looked beyond the mere temporalities of life, she desired to cast in her lot with the descendants of Abraham. It may be that the religion which her mother-in-law brought with her into Moab had become the daughter's hope; and, discerning in it those elements of truth which were wanting in the faith of her own fathers, she naturally concluded that the people who were guided by its promises and commands would have power and blessing from above. When we add to this the fact that this woman was to be one in that line of generation through which passed the seed of the Shiloh, that the child yet to be born to her was to be the father of David's sire, we may see how direct is the conclusion that this heathen woman did, in her conduct, obey not merely the impulses of nature, but the influences of grace. It does not appear probable that God, having such a work for her to do, would leave her to herself; that He would trust to her unguided will and emotion the part which He designed her to act in His great scheme of love. The decision of Ruth, then, supplies us with this proposition: those who are striving to serve the Lord should cling to those who are the disciples of the same Master. The law of dependence, as it acts upon this world of human beings, and resolves itself into the other laws of influence and of sympathy, is found in all the relations of man. In itself it is a beautiful thing, this leaning of one upon another, this clasping of hand to hand in the great circle of human brotherhood, and feeling the electric spark as the touch of a single finger sends a thrill through the multitude. Man was born for this thing, even when he was born without sin; and that would be a high life where this law of sympathy was at work, with no power but the power of doing good. With us, however, the kindest laws of heaven have felt the disturbing force of sin; and sin has so perverted them that they act against their design, and in opposition to themselves. The influences, then, of one upon another may be for evil, as well as for good; the best intentions may be counteracted, and the best efforts frustrated, by those with whom we stand connected under the laws of social life. If we desire to serve God and be the sincere followers of our Lord we must break away from those who are serving other gods, and seek the companionship of those who serve the God of Israel. If, in times past, our associations have been with worldly persons, if we have moved in that circle of life where there is no God save the passions, and no law save the will, we must break out from this circle and enter another where life takes a higher form. We must surround ourselves with those whose thoughts and aims are upward, like our own, that thus our strivings may be aided, and our efforts sustained, by those with whom we have to do. This counsel touches some of the most delicate points in the social state. It enters into the

family circle, and draws its lines between those who have a common interest in the things which concern the body. It sweeps through all our connections, from the highest to the lowest, and demands that everywhere, and under every form, its authority be acknowledged and its injunctions obeyed. Now, of these ties of nature, some are voluntary, and others are not. Of the latter I will not now speak; while concerning the former I have something more to say. The tie of marriage is a voluntary tie, and I here confess my amazement at the readiness with which Christians yoke themselves with unbelievers. I know of few greater hindrances to a consistent walking with God than an irreligious husband or an irreligious wife. We say, and the remark is applied to religious things, that the husband can go his way, and the wife her way; but this proves, in the trial, to be about as practicable as for the parts of the body to separate and move off in opposite directions. The tie forbids this independence; and there is not a Christian wife or husband in the world who can so overcome the law which holds them as to act with entire freedom in the face of indifference or opposition. It is time for some one to tell the people that marriage is an institution of the Most High God, and that in its laws it touches the interests which are eternal as well as those which are temporal. (*S. Cooke, D.D.*)

Ruth's spiritual affinity with Naomi.—This family feeling reigns among all the true sons of God under every dispensation. It operates with all the steadiness of an instinct. Apart altogether from Divine commands, believers exercise mutual attraction like planets that move round the same central orb. They are conscious of "the unity of the Spirit." Under the Old Testament, "they that feared the Lord spake often one to another"; under the New Testament, "they that believed were together." There is not an instance recorded in the whole inspired history of Christians preferring to live in isolation from their brethren. If there were only two believers in the same city, they would be irresistibly drawn to each other just in the degree in which they were believers. And those who are thus mutually attracted shed many mutual blessings, like flowers growing contiguous to each other in a garden that drop the dew around each other's roots. And now her God-inspired resolution strengthening and glowing as she proceeds, culminates in a solemn vow of undying constancy, in which she imprecates Heaven's righteous retribution upon herself should she fail to keep it: "The Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me." (*A. Thomson, D.D.*)

Influence.—The Bible affirms that no man liveth to himself. Each life has an influence. What is influence? It is that subtle something which resides in our deeds, words, spirit, and character. It is a shadow of ourselves, our impersonal self. It is to us relatively what the fragrance is to the flowers, what light is to the star. We are all sensitive to influence: our hearts are open to goodness, beauty, genius. There is never a day when perhaps unconsciously we do not receive and reflect a thousand shadowy forms. Some are more receptive of influences than others, just as there are certain soils that drink in more greedily sunshine and shower; and as there are certain bodily conditions more open to disease, so there are certain mental and moral dispositions more open to good and evil, truth and error. There are men like clay—you can mould them as you will; others are like rock—you must chisel them as you can. Naomi was not perfect, but she exerted a great influence upon her daughters-in-law.

I. SOME OF THE LINES ALONG WHICH HER INFLUENCE WAS TRANSMITTED. 1. There was relationship. Naomi was mother-in-law to Ruth. This link was sanctified to the salvation of Ruth. Relationship is to-day one of the most powerful aids to moral influence. See it in the Gospels: Andrew first finds his own brother Simon; Philip findeth Nathanael. Most children are open to maternal influences. Native missionaries are the best. Influence follows love. 2. There was sorrow. These women had shared a common grief: they had watched at the same bed of death; participated in the same hopes and fears. Naomi would comfort Ruth with her Jewish hope and consolation. Sorrow fits for influence. The heart is plastic. The wax is melted and receives the impress of the seal. The mind is filled for the teaching. Such opportunities for transmission of holy influence are constantly occurring. 3. There was humanity. Relationship and sorrow are accidental; humanity is the essential fact, and binds the world together. Angelic influence is impeded by difference in nature. Our hands fit into each other's palm, our faces reflect similar features. We have common wants and ways. Influence runs along the lines of our human brotherhood.

II. SOME OF THE IMPEDIMENTS THAT MIGHT HAVE INTERRUPTED HER INFLUENCE. There were considerations adverse to her influence. 1. Nationality. Ruth was a Moabitess. Israel and Moab were ancient enemies. The Turk will not readily yield to the English influence. Yet so great is the power

of moral influence that it overcame this barrier. 2. Education. Ruth had grown up to womanhood before she came under the influence of Naomi; her habits were formed. She was a devout idolatress. Here was a strong impediment for moral influence to overcome. Virgin soil may be easily cultivated as we wish; not so the land long covered with weeds. When the whole man is overrun with noxious principles it is not easy to exterminate and implant new ideas and habits. This the good life of Naomi accomplished in Ruth. 3. Adverse example. Orpah went back to Moab. The good influence may fail even where its power has been felt strongly. Who can estimate the power of adverse example to-day! How many are turned by it from the ways of religion! Naomi may be counteracted by Orpah. III. THE SUCCESS OF THE GOOD INFLUENCE. The success was not absolute. Orpah returned, Ruth continued. See her wisdom. She in her turn becomes influential and useful—a help to Naomi. She becomes a permanent factor in the redemptive history. See the wisdom of yielding to high moral influences. (*E. Biscombe.*) *The power of Christian character* shining through the life of a Christian man is strikingly illustrated in the following incident: “An Afghan once spent an hour in the company of Dr. William Marsh, of England. When he heard that Dr. Marsh was dead, he said: ‘His religion shall now be my religion; his God shall be my God; for I must go where he is and see his face again.’” **If ought but death part thee and me.—Religion a powerful bond:—**1. Such and so powerful is the bond of religion that it makes the saints of God not only desirous, but even resolute also, both to live and die together. 2. All persons and people should so live as those that do expect that they and their relations may die. So Ruth did here expect it, both for her mother and for herself. “Alas, I never thought of his death.” So there be others that live so licentiously as if they should never die, never come to judgment, as if they were to have an eternity of pleasure of sin in this world (as Psa. xlix. 10–13). 3. As burial is one of the dues of the dead, so dear friends desire to be buried together. Ruth desires to be buried with her godly mother. It is very observable that the first purchase of possession mentioned in Scripture history was a place to bury in, not to build in (Gen. xxiii. 9). 4. Death is the final dissolution of all bonds of duty, whether natural, civil, or religious. The wife is no longer bound to her husband (Rom. vii. 1–4), children to parents, subjects to princes, and people to pastors. (*C. Ness.*)

Ver. 18. **When she saw that she was stedfastly minded to go with her, then she left speaking unto her.**—*Trust after testing:—*After proof and trial made of their fidelity we are to trust our brethren, without any further suspicion. Not to try before we trust is want of wisdom; not to trust after we have tried is want of charity. The goldsmith must purify the dross and ore from the gold, but he must be wary lest he makes waste of good metal if over-curious in too often refining. We may search and sound the sincerity of our brethren, but after good experience made of their uprightness we must take heed lest by continual sifting and proving them we offend a weak Christian. (*T. Fuller, B.D.*) *Benefit of a thorough decision:—*Those who appear half-hearted in their self-consecration expose themselves to a legion of tempters. Linger on the border-land, they keep within the arrow-mark of Satan. Keeping in the suburbs of Sodom, they are in danger of coming within the sweep of its consuming fires. The world hopes that it shall get them back again to its ranks. They resemble persons walking in a crowd with flowing robes, which afford those who wish them evil an easy means of pulling them back and laying them in the dust. When it becomes clearly seen that our heart is fixed, the world gives us up in despair and “leaves off speaking unto us.” And how that choice ennobled the young Monibess! What pure human love! What high devotion! What sublime self-renunciation! What true wisdom introducing among the elements that should determine her choice eternity as well as time! Decision of character gives full play to a man's powers whatever they be, and makes them his own. (*A. Thomson, D.D.*) *Decision a safeguard:—*If a man is seen to be decided in his stand for Christ, antagonists will give over assailing him. There is nothing in the use of which men are more discriminating than entreaty, argument, or influence. So long as the object of their solicitude is wavering, they will bring all their batteries to bear upon him, for there is still the hope that he will yield. But when he comes openly and determinedly out for Christ, they will waste no more ammunition on him. They leave him thenceforth alone, and attack some one else. Thus decision, while it may require an effort to make it, is, after it is made, a safeguard against assault. So long as a vessel has no flag at her mast-head, the sea-robber

may think it safe to attack her; but let her hoist the flag of this nation, and that will make the assailant pause. In like manner, the hoisting over us of the banner of the Cross, being a symbol of decision, is also an assurance of protection. (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*)

Ver. 19. So they two went until they came to Bethlehem.—*Constancy*.—I. THAT THEY ARE TO BE ADMITTED INTO OUR FELLOWSHIP WHOM WE FIND TO BE CONSTANT IN A GOOD COURSE, AND TRUE LOVERS OF GOODNESS, WHATSOEVER THEY WERE BEFORE. Naomi thus admits of Ruth, no doubt, with great comfort. Thus Paul alloweth of Mark (2 Tim. iv. 11), though before he had refused him (Acts xv. 39), and willeth others to entertain him (Col. iv. 10, 11). II. THAT GOD LEAVETH NOT HIS IN DISTRESS, OR ALTOGETHER COMFORTLESS. Naomi went out with husband and children, and lost them; she returneth not alone, but God sent her one to accompany her and to comfort her. III. THAT A TRUE RESOLUTION WILL SHOW ITSELF IN A FULL EXECUTION. She resolved to go with Naomi, and so she did, till she came to Bethlehem. By this may we learn to know the difference between solid resolutions and sudden flashes, raw and undigested purposes, between true resolutions and such as be made in show, but in substance prove nothing so, never seen in the effects. IV. IN THIS THEIR TRAVEL TO CANAAN, AND THEREIN TO BETHLEHEM, NOTE THREE THINGS: THEIR UNITY, FERVENTCY, AND CONSTANCY. They went together lovingly, they ceased not to go on, they did not linger, they took no by-paths, neither forgat they whither they were going, till they came unto Bethlehem in Canaan. As these thus went to Canaan, so should we unto the spiritual Canaan and heavenly Bethlehem; we must go in unity (1 Cor. i. 10), and be of one heart (Acts i. 14, ii. 1, 46, and iv. 24), in a godly fervency (Rom. xii. 11; Titus ii. 14; Ezek. iii. 14), as Elijah, Nehemiah, the angel of Ephesus (Rev. ii. 1, 2), and as our Saviour, whom the zeal of God's house had eaten up. And we must go in a constant spirit, and not be weary of well-doing, for "he that continueth to the end shall be saved." (*R. Bernard.*) *True friendship*.—1. Such is the faithfulness of our heavenly Father to all His children, that He never fails nor forsakes them; but when one comfort faileth them, He findeth out another for them. The loss of one relation is made up out of God's fulness by raising up another. 2. There be but few friends that are true friends. Here be but two together. 3. Such are fast and faithful friends indeed that accompany each other to the worship of God—to Bethlehem. Many there be that do accompany each other to Bethaven, or house of wickedness, to play-houses, and places of revelling, &c. This is rather a betraying than a befriending one another. A carnal friend is but a spiritual enemy, who advised the ruin of his soul for the recovery of his body (2 Sam. xiii. 3). The truest friendship is to save and deliver a friend from the greatest evil, which is sin; but to tempt any to it, and to tolerate them in it, is not the part of a true friend, but of a real enemy. 4. 'Tis matter of astonishing admiration to hear of, and be eye-witnesses of, the great afflictions that do befall some persons, both great and good. 5. God works wonderful changes in persons, families, cities, countries and kingdoms. (*C. Ness.*) *The backslider's return*.—Naomi had wandered. But Naomi might return. God had not cast her away. He will never cast away those who truly love Him. He calls them back again to true repentance. He heals their backslidings and loves them freely. Then, like Peter, they may strengthen their brethren. They have an experience of human infirmity which they had not before. They know the dangers and temptations which surround the Christian's path. They can comfort others with the consolations wherewith they are comforted of God. But the backslider must return with total self-renunciation. Thus Naomi even renounces her right to her former name. "Call me not Naomi, call me Mara: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me." They said, "Is this Naomi?" "Yes, I was Naomi when I was contented and happy in the house, and among the people of God. I was Naomi when we took sweet counsel together, and walked to the house of God in company. How foolish was I thus to wander from His holy ways! Call me not Naomi now. I have no right to that name. All was pleasant then. But the remembrance is bitterness now. Call me Mara. Let me come back as the poorest of the poor, sorrowful, and self-condemned." The backslider feels no claim to a former Christian character. He is compelled to say, "Call me not a Christian. I have forfeited that blessed name. Call me a sinner, the chief of sinners. But as such, suffer me to return again to God. 'I am no more worthy to be called a son; make me as one of Thy hired servants.'" The backslider must come back with conscious emptiness. He

has nothing to bring; nothing to offer. Naomi says, "I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty." How true is this! What can you bring back from your wanderings in Moab but the bitter remembrance of your folly? Nothing but sadness can come from a careless backsliding from God. And so far as your own acts and conduct are concerned, you must return to Him with perfect emptiness. If Divine grace and long-suffering shall receive you—if the Holy Spirit shall consent to restore you, and lead you back to the mercy-seat, once more accepted—it will be all as a free gift to the chief of sinners. Yet how precious is the expression, "The Lord hath brought me back"! Yes, though I am empty, and have nothing; though I am vile in His sight, and "mine own clothes abhor me," though I was worthy of His rejection and His wrath, yet He did not leave me in my sin, nor suffer me, unpardoned, to perish. But I come back empty. Everything has failed me except the loving-kindness and mercy of my God. No condition can be more humbling than this. Let this work of the Holy Spirit have free course in you. Do not attempt the least justification of yourselves. Speak not, think not, of any temptation that led you astray, or of the influence of any companions, or of the want of watchfulness of any friends, or of the unfaithfulness of others in instructing and warning you, or of the example and habits of others in the social circle in which you live, as the least extenuation of your own guilt. Oh, no! You have no one to blame but yourself! You have been tempted only because you were drawn away by your own lust. Yet, while the backslider himself mourns, others rejoice over him. "It came to pass, when they were come to Bethlehem, that all the city was moved about them; and they said, Is this Naomi?" Her friends had not forgotten her. They gather around her again with delight. All Bethlehem rejoices; Naomi's poverty and wanderings are forgotten. She has herself returned, and this is enough. The poor prodigal had hardly time to say, "Father, I have sinned," before his father buries his voice in his own bosom, and lifts up a sound of joy which completely drowns the accents of the wanderer's grief. Oh, what a song of praise does his restoration awaken! Heaven and earth unite to say, over the returning wanderer, "Is this Naomi?" Is this the wanderer? This the captive that we thought was lost? This the giddy child that was bent to backsliding, and fled from all restraint? Sing, O heavens, for the Lord hath done it. Shout, ye lower parts of the earth, for the Lord hath blotted out as a thick cloud their transgressions, and as a cloud their sins! (*S. H. Tyng, D.D.*) **All the city was moved about them, and they said, Is this Naomi?** —*The changes wrought by time* :—Ten years ago she left, but is not forgotten. The story of her battle with poverty and consequent emigration are well remembered. But what a change! This bent form and aspect of despair tell a pitiful tale. Time and sorrow have wrought their cruel work. Ten years, and such troubles as hers leave terrible marks behind at her time of life. Wrinkles, grey hairs, and feebleness of body soon reveal themselves. Care makes men and women grow old very fast. We look twice—thrice, at the acquaintance of former years, before we believe our eyes. "Is this Naomi?" That means, where are the husband and the sons? It is no vulgar curiosity that prompts the inquiry. Women who knew Naomi well, and attended her wedding, are there; men, too, who were intimate friends of Elimelech; young men also, who as boys often played with the dead lads Mahlon and Chilion, all eagerly repeat the question to each other as they cluster round the two poor, travel-stained, weeping women. It is a bitter hour. The wounds are opened afresh. For no questions cut so keenly as those which remind us of beloved ones who have passed into the shadow of death. (*Wm. Braden.*) *The changes of life* :—I. HERE IS A RETURNING PILGRIM. Home has been but a tent life, and the curtains have been rent by sorrow and death. She tells us the old, old story. Here have we no continuing city. Bethlehem—home! Oh! that strange longing to live through the closing years in the country places where we were born! It is a common instinct. II. HERE IS A GODLY PILGRIM. Travel-worn and weary, with sandled feet, she is coming to a city sanctified by the faith of her fathers. "Is this Naomi?" If there is not so much of what the world calls beauty in her face, there is character there, experience there. The young Christian starting on his pilgrimage is cheerful enough. He goes forth full of enterprise and hope. Do not be surprised if in after-years you ask, "Is this Naomi?" How careful, how anxious, how dependent on God alone! III. HERE IS AN ANCESTRAL PILGRIM. Ancestor of whom? Turn to Matthew i. 5, and you will find in the genealogy of our Lord the name of Ruth. Do you see in the blue distance One coming from the judgment hall? Do you hear the wild cry of the mob,

"Away with Him! away with Him! Crucify Him! crucify Him!"? Come near and gaze. Behold the Man! As the reapers asked, "Is this Naomi?" so we ask, "Is this Jesus?" Is this He whose sweet face lay in the manger? Is this He who passed the angels at heaven's high gate, and came to earth, saying "Lo! I come to do Thy will, O God"? Yes! Bowed, bruised, broken for us. The same Saviour, who now endures the Cross, despising the shame. Well may we wonder and adore! IV. HERE IS A PROVIDED-FOR PILGRIM. Back to Bethlehem, but how to live? how to find the roof-tree that should shelter again? She knew the Eternal's name, "Jehovah-jireh," the Lord will provide. So it ever is. Trust in the Lord and you shall never want any good thing. Believe still in your Saviour, and provided for you will be all weapons of fence, all means of consolation, all prosperity that shall not harm your soul. As the snows hide flowers even in the Alps, so beneath all our separations and sorrows there are still plants of the Lord, peace and hope, and joy and rest, in Him. Blessed indeed shall we be if we can rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him. (*W. M. Statham.*)

Ver. 20. Call me not Naomi, call me Mara.—*Naomi*:—I. INCIDENTS IN HER LIFE. This world is to all, in some measure, "a vale of tears." The pilgrimage of the true Christian is not through verdant plains and flowery fields, but through a "waste howling wilderness," where much toil is exercised, many troubles undergone, many perils encountered, and many severe privations endured. God is a Sovereign in the distribution of sufferings and tribulations. His own people have frequently the greatest share of troubles in this life—that their souls, which are too full of earthly attachments, may be weaned from the world. We should learn hence not to murmur nor charge God foolishly under our trials, for if we compare them with those of many of God's people who were more gracious in their dispositions and tempers than we are they will appear "light" indeed. We find this bereaved and distressed individual returning towards her native land. She acted wisely, for she was more likely to fare well in her own country—among her relatives and acquaintance, and where the knowledge and fear of God prevailed, than among strangers and idolaters in a foreign land. It would be well if we imitated Naomi in a spiritual point of view. At length we find Naomi in Canaan. When she returned her former acquaintance were greatly astonished at her appearance. Her affluence was gone, her earthly glory had faded away, and her circumstances were mean and narrow. God, however, in mercy, calmed the evening of her day. The troubles of the Christian are not only to end, but to end blessedly—even in bliss and honour! II. MORAL EXCELLENCES WHICH STOOD PROMINENTLY FORTH IN THE CONDUCT OF NAOMI UNDER THE WEIGHT OF HER TRIBULATIONS. 1. Her benevolence. Behold it delightfully displayed towards both her daughters-in-law. See how ardently she wished their prosperity, how fervently she prayed for it. Herein she, and all who are under the governance of the same superhuman principle, resemble their Divine Master. He also felt intensely for others—even when He was Himself involved in dangers. 2. Her acknowledgment of God in her troubles. See how piously she develops this feeling (chap. i. 13, 20, 21). Nothing enables a man to behave as he should in the day of adversity, nothing enables him to keep down an envious and impatient spirit, but the viewing his troubles as the allotments of Heaven, the all-wise appointments of his Father and of his God. 3. Her gratitude both to God and man. (1) Her gratitude to God. If a few handfuls of corn excited Naomi to offer to her heavenly Father a sacrifice of such fervent praise, how fervent should our praise be for abundance of spiritual food, for Christ Himself to be the strength and joy of our souls? If a little earthly food is a mercy to be acknowledged in songs of adoring praise, how much warmer should our affection be for endless and unmingled felicity for the whole man in the land of everlasting life? (2) Her gratitude to man. Inasmuch as Ruth had shown kindness to her in Moab, she showed her all possible kindness in Judah. (*John Hughes.*) **The Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me.**—*Unfinished providences not to be rashly judged*:—How unfit are we to judge of an unfinished providence, and how necessary it is, if we would understand aright the reasons of God's ways, that we should wait and see the web with its many colours woven out! Three short months, during which those dark providences were suddenly to blossom into prosperity and joy, would give to that sorrowful woman another interpretation of her long exile in Moab. And one Gentile proselyte was thereby to be brought to the feet of Israel's God, who was not only to be the ancestress of Israel's illustrious line of kings, but

of that Divine Seed in whom "all the nations of the earth were to be blessed." When the night seems at the darkest we are often nearest the dawn. Begin to tune thy harp, O weeping saint and weary pilgrim! "The night is far spent, the day is at hand." Learn to wait. When the great drama of our earth's history is ended; when Christ's glorious redemption-work is seen in all its wondrous issues and ripened fruits; when order has evolved itself out of confusion, and light has come out of the bosom of darkness, and the evil passions of wicked men and the malignant devices of evil spirits have been so overruled as to work out the sovereign will of Heaven; when all the enemies of Christ have been put in subjection under His feet, and death itself has died—then shall the words spoken at the creation be repeated at the consummation of the higher work of a lost world's redemption, and God will again pronounce all to be "very good." (*A. Thomson, D.D.*)

Naomi's error:—Naomi began to err when she ceased to believe in the wisdom and benignity of all those dark events, when she looked upon them, not as expressive of paternal discipline, but of Divine indifference and desertion, when they appeared to her distressed soul as the arrows of judgment rather than the strokes of love; like those affrighted disciples on the Galilean lake who failed to recognize Jesus in Him who was walking in such calm majesty on the tossing waves. She was also wrong in this morbid concentration of her thoughts upon her trials, and in not realizing the many blessings and comforts that yet remained to her. Elimelech and her two sons had been taken, but this lovely and devoted Ruth had been raised up. She was now poor, but she had health; and God had brought her back to those altars and courts of the Lord after which "her soul had longed, yea, even fainted." And then there were blessings which she could not lose, and which were of more value to her than a thousand worlds. Besides, how greatly did she err, as devout persons in a despondent mood are so apt to do, in measuring God's providence, as it were, by her human line, and imagining that the cloud which had hung over her like a shadow of death could not possibly be turned into the morning; just as we may imagine the people near the pole, with their many months of unbroken night, beginning at length to doubt whether the sun will ever rise again. An eloquent writer on astronomy imagines the different aspect in which our earth would appear to us could we be projected from its surface and permitted to look on it from one of the nearest planets, or from the moon. And how different would the afflictions of God's people often look could they only be projected a few years into the future, and permitted to regard them even in some of their earliest explanations and consequences. Lift up thy head, O thou bruised reed, thou too desponding woman, for lo, the winter of thine adversity is past! Cease to clothe everything in sackcloth. Take down thy long silent harp from the willows, and tune it anew for notes of loudest praise. Thou hast long exercised the duty of self-denial; it is time for thee now to exhibit the duty of delight. (*Ibid.*)

No bitterness in God's dealings:—Naomi was not wrong in tracing all her changes in condition to God, but she erred in ascribing any bitterness to God in His treatment of her. The father loves the child as really when he administers the disagreeable medicine which is to recover him from disease as when he is dandling him upon his knees. The only difference is in the manner in which the love is shown, and that is accounted for by the differences in the circumstances of the child. In like manner adversity, how bitter soever it may be, is a manifestation of God's love to us, designed for our ultimate and highest welfare. Now this may well reconcile us to trial. It will not make the trial less, but it will help us to bear it, just as the wounded man is braced for the amputation of a limb when he is told that it is indispensable if his life is to be preserved. (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*)

The different effects of affliction:—How different are summer storms from winter ones! In winter they rush over the earth with their violence; and if any poor remnants of foliage or flowers have lingered behind, these are swept along at one gust. Nothing is left but desolation; and long after the rain has ceased, pools of water and mud bear tokens of what has been. But when the clouds have poured out their torrents in summer, when the winds have spent their fury, and the sun breaks forth again in glory, all things seem to rise with renewed loveliness from their refreshing bath. The flowers, glistening with rainbows, smell sweeter than before; the air, too, which may previously have been oppressive, is become clear, and soft, and fresh. Such, too, is the difference, when the storms of affliction fall on hearts unrenewed by Christian faith, and on those who abide in Christ. In the former they bring out the dreariness and desolation which may before have been unapparent. But in the true Christian soul, "though weeping may endure for a night, joy cometh in the

morning," and tribulation itself is turned into the chief of blessings. (C. H. Spurgeon.)

Ver. 22. **So Naomi returned, and Ruth.**—*The young convert*:—Little was Naomi aware of the treasure she was bringing to Israel or of the honour which was in store for Ruth. She says, "The Lord hath brought me back empty." And it was so, so far as she was herself concerned. But the Lord had brought back with her one whom all generations should call blessed; one who was to be a mother of the promised Messiah, the anointed Saviour of Israel. We are now to contemplate her admission to Israel. The young convert's entrance among the people of God. We cannot enter upon such a view without stopping for a moment to think of the happiness of Naomi in such a companion. How great was the privilege to her to bring back with her own return so precious a soul to the Lord of hosts! What an unspeakable joy it is to a Christian parent to be attended by his children in the heavenly path! "So they two went together until they came to Bethlehem." I cannot conceive a greater blessing in social life than when we can say this of father and son, of mother and daughter. This is a bond which must long outlast every other one; and a treasure of enjoyment which must remain when every other one has failed. How such companionship in religion relieves the sorrows of the road! How it multiplies the joys of the way! The mother and the daughter take sweet counsel together on their journey. Naomi has much to tell, Ruth has much to ask, in reference to the new home to which they are returning together. Their mutual prayers and encouragements are full of advantage. The blending of the varied experience of the two becomes helpful to both. The despondency of age is animated by the joyful anticipations of youth. The effervescence of youth is moderated by the experience and soberness of age. "So they went together." Unity of feeling, unity of interest, unity of hope, bind them together. They have fellowship one with another. But while Ruth took sweet counsel with Naomi her thoughts and feelings were still in a great degree peculiar to herself and completely her own. To her every prospect is hopeful, and her imagination loves to stray through all the anticipations which are presented to her youthful mind. The young Christian truly living and walking in Christ rejoices in the hopes which a Saviour gives; is encouraged, ardent, and delighted in looking forward over the way in which the great Captain of salvation is leading the sons of God. "I see no trials or sorrows in it." Thus would Ruth have said. She could have no feeling but unmingled pleasure in the prospect of the journey she had undertaken. Delightful encouragements arise in her mind which overwhelm all possible regrets or fears. How many hopes and plans cluster around Bethlehem and Judah! She knows not what the Lord has prepared for her. It has not entered into her youthful heart to conceive the actual blessings which are laid up in store for her there. But she knows that all must be well and happy for her under the shadow of His wings in whom she has come to put her trust. Nothing is in your way. You may do all things through Christ that strengtheneth you, and be made more than conquerors in Him. She comes with a deep sense of her own unworthiness. But this is silenced by her conscious desire and choice. The young convert knows and feels his guilt. But he needs not, and does not, stop to sit down under the mere dominion of grief for the past. He has his new work to do. He must press forward in it. And the cloud will pass away and leave him in the sunshine of his Saviour's love, to finish and perfect it. But the perseverance of Ruth furnishes us with another most important example. "They went together until they came to Bethlehem." There is no fact which gives the Church more peculiar joy in the coming of young converts to Christ than their habitual perseverance. They are the ones who "hold fast the beginning of their confidence steadfast unto the end." The most fruitful, faithful Christians are habitually those who begin the earliest. The time of Ruth's arrival at Bethlehem was most significant. "They came to Bethlehem in the beginning of barley harvest." The barley harvest of Palestine was in the early spring. The barley was sown after the autumnal rains, in the month of October, and the harvest was in the month of April. It was a time of special joy, the first spring-gathering of their annual fruits. The harvest is always employed as an illustration of satisfaction and joy. "They joy before Thee, according to the joy of harvest." And is it not always a scene of rejoicing when the sinner returns? The harvest was a time of opening abundance. No wants or poverty were pressing now. There is thus bread enough and to spare in the Saviour's house. And when the sinner finds a shelter there he finds all his needs supplied. His soul has

abundance of all things which it desireth. No more encouraging time could there have been for Ruth's first acquaintance with Israel. Every aspect of the land was promising and prosperous. The sight of plenty crowned every prospect. And she sees her new home clothed with every attraction. Is it not always so when we first come to the feet of Jesus and find our pence and acceptance there? Now we seem to live for the first time. There is reality, happiness, satisfaction here. We have found Him whom our soul loveth, and we have found everything we want in Him. The barley harvest was the time of the Passover. Thus this young convert from the Gentiles comes as the first-fruits of a Gentile harvest to be gathered, and is welcomed with Israel as a partaker of the paschal feast. Happy are we in welcoming our youthful friends giving evidence of their new birth for God and their living faith in Jesus to the table of the Lord. Happy is the house the first-fruits of which are thus consecrated and sanctified to be the Lord's for ever. (S. H. Tyng, D.D.)

CHAPTER II.

VER. 1. Naomi had a kinsman.—A kind kinsman:—I. GOD NEVER WANTS HIS INSTRUMENTS OF SUCCOUR UNTO THOSE THAT TRUST IN HIS MERCY. Some relation (either natural or spiritual) God will raise up to relieve His in their deepest extremity. II. SOME RICH MEN MAY YET BE RELIGIOUS MEN. Though indeed they be rare birds, yet riches and religion are not inconsistent things. III. IT IS A BRAVE ATTAINMENT TO BE RICH IN THIS WORLD, AND TO BE RICH IN GOOD WORKS TOO. So Boaz was. Boaz did not make gold his confidence, but was rich in faith (Jas. ii. 5), and rich to God (Luke xii. 21). (C. Ness.) Boaz a yeoman:—In these early days, especially under the rule of the judges, when hostile inroads on the chosen people were so frequently made by unfriendly neighbours, the man who had great possessions was in a manner compelled to be also a military leader, and so we may very justly combine the two meanings, and speak of him as a valiant man and a wealthy; or, as Dr. Morison has paraphrased the expression, "a strong and substantial yeoman." (W. M. Taylor, D.D.) The rich kinsman:—All that the appointed kinsman could do for the estate and body of his impoverished relative the Lord Jesus as our goel does for our souls and our everlasting state. In His humanity He is our nearest kinsman. In His Deity, he is perfectly able to supply all our wants, and to defend us from every danger and oppression. As the promised goel, the Lord Jesus has a special relation to Israel as a nation, and a particular personal relation to every believing soul. He is the goel, the Kinsman Redeemer of the nation of Israel. He is the seed of Abraham, in whom all the nations are to be blessed. God gave the land of Canaan unto Abraham, and unto his seed for ever. It was to be their permanent possession. But the children of Abraham have been long since cast out of their inheritance. Their land has been taken from them, and they have been wanderers and exiles on the heart. Yet God ordained that this land should not be sold for ever, because it was His land. It was Immanuel's land. And Immanuel is their kinsman according to the flesh, who is to restore again that land to the seed of Abraham. His feet are in that day to stand upon the Mount of Olives. But the Lord Jesus Christ is also our goel, our Kinsman Redeemer—to fulfil the great duties of a Restorer to us. He restores that which He took not away. He has redeemed our lost estate. He has brought life and immortality to light, and given us a kingdom which cannot be moved. He has redeemed our persons from bondage and condemnation. We may go to Him just as freely and hopefully as the impoverished Jew went to his kinsman, perfectly sure that He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. This gracious character of our blessed Saviour is brought out in many points of view in the history of Boaz. When Naomi returned to Judah with Ruth, she found a goel already prepared for her. He was "a mighty man of wealth," perfectly able to meet all their wants, and to restore them to their happy condition again. And such a kinsman has been provided for us. We need not say, "Who shall ascend up to heaven to bring Christ down from above?" He is already prepared to be a Saviour for us, before we are born. We have nothing to do but to receive Him, trust in Him, and obey Him, as our gracious Lord. Like Boaz, He is "a mighty man of wealth." All

things in heaven and earth are His. And if we are His, all things are ours. He can enrich His people with every conceivable blessing. No good thing can they want while they have Him for their friend and portion. The name of this rich kinsman of Naomi's was Boaz, which means strength. In this name we may find a memorial of our Divine Redeemer. Jesus is our strength and our salvation. He is the power of God unto salvation for us. What mighty works He has done for us! What works of mercy is He still willing to accomplish! He is our Kinsman Redeemer. We see Him in His lowly human, suffering form, wearing our nature, and bearing the burden of our sins. We see Him in the unsearchable riches of His grace as God over all, and in the triumphs of His obedience as the Lord our Righteousness, possessing unlimited wealth to be applied to our needs. We see Him of infinite might, exalted above the heavens, angels, authorities, and powers being made subject unto Him. We see Him fully provided for us, waiting to be gracious to us, and ready to receive the poorest and the most wretched of His kinsmen who come to Him. (*S. H. Tyng, D.D.*)

Vers. 2-4. *Let me now go to the field, and glean.*—*The young to work for their parents*:—Ruth does not propose that Naomi should go with her to the field. She wished her honoured mother to enjoy the rest and ease suited to her time of life, whilst she herself was exposed to the troubles and inconveniences of her humble occupation in the fields of strangers. Young persons should be cheerfully willing to bear fatigues and troubles for the sake of their aged parents, that they may enjoy such ease as the infirmities of age require. The charities of the heart sweeten life. A young woman cheerfully labouring for aged parents is far happier than a fashionable lady spending in idleness and dissipation the fruits of the industry of her ancestors. (*G. Lawson.*) *A dutiful daughter*:—1. God often raises high buildings upon weak foundations. Great things often come from small beginnings. 2. All daughters ought to be dutiful daughters unto those mothers whom God hath set over them; they should ask their counsel, and obey their commands, as Ruth did here her mother-in-law, Naomi. 3. That poverty should not make any person have low thoughts of piety; Ruth doth not grudge at God for keeping His servants no better. 4. All honest endeavours ought to be used for supplying wants, but not by any wicked ways whatsoever. Ruth here resolves not to return to Moab under her present wants, as Israel did under their wilderness wants to return to Egypt; neither doth she think of such wicked ways as stealing to satisfy her hunger. Neither yet doth Ruth resolve to take up the begging trade, as too many lusty vagrants and vagabonds do in our time, but she rather resolves to labour with her hands. 5. That even lawful liberty ought not to be used without modesty and humility in asking leave. A good heart inquireth, "Is it lawful, decent, and expedient?" 6. Such as find grace and favour in the sight of God shall undoubtedly find no less in the sight of man. God will speak in the hearts of men, for all such as wait on Him in the way of His providence, labouring with their hands (*Jer. xv. 11; Prov. xvi. 7*). 7. A meek spirit gives forth mild speeches. Some persons have quick and hot spirits, yea, even good persons. That Naomi should be thus meek in her misery was much, for misery is a morose thing of itself, and unhinges the spirit; yet sanctified affliction contributes much to meekness even a choleric mind. (*C. Ness.*) *The gleaner*:—We have seen how ample were the relief and the portion provided for Ruth. 1. The first step is to reduce her to the deepest necessity. She has arrived with Naomi in Bethlehem. But they are there in great poverty, and with no apparent means of relief. How this very necessity brought out a proof of the excellence of Ruth! Love for her mother constrained her to seek a supply for their need. And she came to the field, as a poor stranger, to gather up the scattered heads of barley which the reapers had left in their path, and in the corners of the field. It could have been the result only of extreme necessity. Thus God brings the soul that He has loved and saved to an experience of utter want. He makes every hope to fail, every means of spiritual safety to depart. The sinner must be thus brought down to feel himself lost and perishing. And when the Spirit has accomplished this, it is an important and blessed step toward a full revelation of the riches of grace already prepared for him. 2. The next step is to take away all feeling of rebellious pride in their state of want. Ruth had great self-respect, a dignity of character that would have honoured any condition in life. But she had no pride that rebelled against her condition. "Let me glean after him in whose sight I shall find grace." This is a most happy and a most exemplary state of mind. She demanded and expected

nothing as a claim of merit or right. How important to you is such an example. But it is thus God leads the sinful soul to its great Kinsman. His gracious plan is to give everything freely, and to make man receive His free gifts with grateful acknowledgment that he has deserved nothing. But how long do we struggle against this spirit! How hard it seems contentedly to depend on mere grace to the ungodly! This is one main obstacle in the way of our salvation. 3. The next step is one of gracious providence, to bring her, as it were by accident, to an unexpected introduction to her rich kinsman. Ruth is wholly ignorant of him or of the location of his fields. She is equally ignorant of the exalted connection she is to have with him. To her the future of life is darkness. But God, her gracious God, in whom she trusts, is light in whom is no darkness at all. What an encouragement to us does this ignorance of hers afford! How abounding may be God's provided mercies for us! Ruth goes out into the harvest-field of Judæa, separated among its various owners only by landmarks, which could not be distinguished at a distance, not knowing to whose field she might be led. But God had disposed and prepared her way before her. "Her hap was to light on a part of the field belonging to Boaz." It was God's own plan for her, another part of which was now coming out to her view. And when at last she finds the gracious end to which the whole is brought, she could look back upon this, and say, "Now I know why I was made so poor, and led to Boaz's field to glean." How often is the gracious providence of God thus manifested in bringing the poor and perishing soul under the ministry of the Word. How applicable to our purpose is this illustration! The first sight of a Saviour is attractive and lovely to the seeking, sinful soul. The sinner comes into the midst of his flock, and is struck with the precious blessings which they enjoy. The Shepherd stands in their midst. Jesus is there, to awaken, instruct, sanctify, and feed His people. The hearts of all are evidently refreshed by Him. He blesses them, in the ministry of His Word, by the teaching of His Spirit. They praise Him with grateful homage in return. The whole scene is awakening and attractive. Thus often the most abiding impressions of the value of religion, of the excellence of a Saviour's worth, and the happiness of those who faithfully wait upon Him, are received. Men are drawn to Christ, and made happy in trusting Him, by the enjoyment which His people evidently derive from His service. And nothing is more important than that Christians should ever wear an aspect and maintain an influence which will adorn the doctrine they profess. "I see," said Richard Cecil, contemplating his own sinful, wasted life, in his youth, "I see two unquestionable facts. First, my mother is greatly afflicted in circumstances, body, and mind; and yet I see that she cheerfully bears up under it, by the support which she derives from constantly retiring to her closet and reading her Bible. Second, that she has a secret spring of comfort of which I know nothing; while I, who seek pleasure by every means, seldom or never find it. If, however, there is any such secret in religion why may I not attain it as well as my mother? I will immediately seek it from God." He rose from his bed instantly, and began to pray. And when the Saviour comes in thus to bless His people, "sweetly the sacred odours spread." Sinners are drawn and encouraged to come to One so gracious and so compassionate. The reapers of His harvest are animated and strengthened by His presence, and the Word of His grace goes out with special power to the souls of those who hear. (*S. H. Tyng, D.D.*) *Motive for permitting the poor to glean*:—One forcible motive to persuade the rich to suffer the poor to glean may be this: Even the greatest in respect of God is but a gleaner. God, He is the master of the harvest; all gifts and graces they are His in an infinite measure, and every godly man more or less gleans from Him. Abraham gleaned a great glean of faith, Moses of meekness, Joshua of valour, Samson of strength, Solomon of wealth and wisdom, St. Paul of knowledge, and the like. Now, if we would be glad at our hearts that the Lord would give us free leave and liberty for to glean graces out of His harvest, let us not grudge and repine that poor people glean a little gain from our plenty. (*T. Fuller, B.D.*)

Ver. 3. Her hap was to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz.—*Gleanings in the field of Boaz*:—1. I learn, first, from this subject, how trouble develops character. 2. Again, I see in my text the beauty of unfaltering friendship. 3. Again, I learn from this subject that paths which open in hardship and darkness often come out in places of joy. And so it often is that a path which starts very darkly ends very brightly. When you started out for heaven,

oh, how dark was the hour of conviction—how Sinai thundered, and devils tormented, and the darkness thickened! All the sins of your life pounced upon you. After a while you went into the harvest field of God's mercy; you began to glean in the fields of Divine promise, and you had more sheaves than you could carry, as the voice of God addressed you, saying, "Blessed is the man whose transgressions are forgiven and whose sins are covered." A very dark starting in conviction; a very bright ending in the pardon, and the hope, and the triumph of the gospel. So, very often, in our worldly business or in our spiritual career, we start off on a very dark path. We have to ford the river, we have to climb the mountain, we have to storm the castle; but, blessed be God! the day of rest and reward will come. 4. Again, I have to learn from my subject that events which seem to be most insignificant may be momentous. Can you imagine anything more unimportant than the coming of a poor woman from Moab to Judah? Can you imagine anything more trivial than the fact that this Ruth just happened to alight—as they say—just happened to alight on that field of Boaz? Yet all ages, all generations, have an interest in the fact. So it is in your history and in mine; events that you thought of no importance at all have been of very great moment. That casual conversation, that accidental meeting—you did not think of it again for a long while; but how it changed all the phase of your life. 5. Again, I see in my subject an illustration of the beauty of female industry. 6. Once more; I learn from my subject the value of gleanings. It is all the straws that make the harvest, it is the pence that make the pound, and it is all the opportunities of doing good that make a life of usefulness if rightly employed. Elihu Burritt learned many things while toiling in a blacksmith's shop. Abercrombie, the world-renowned philosopher, was a philosopher in Scotland, and he got his philosophy, or the chief part of it, while as a physician he was waiting for the door of the sick-room to open. (*T. De Witt Talmage.*) *Great issues out of little things*:—It was strikingly remarked by Pascal that "if the nose of Cleopatra had been a little longer or shorter it would have changed the history of the world." The cackling of geese once saved Rome. An apple falling from a tree suggested to Sir Isaac Newton that great law by which he unlocked the mysteries of the starry firmament and shed a new light on the whole creation of God. The lifting of the lid of a common tea-kettle by the steam generated within it set James Watt upon a train of thought that led to the invention of a steam-engine, which has revolutionised our whole manufacturing industry and multiplied human intercourse a thousandfold. A reed of an unknown species, borne to the feet of Columbus by the Atlantic wave awakened in his mind the conjecture that there must be another continent; and this issued at length in the discovery of America. A little bird, flying from the mouth of the cave in which Mohammed is concealed, misleads the soldiers that are seeking his destruction; and this influences the character of religion and the history of our race for many centuries over the larger portion of the earth. Pharaoh's daughter, coming down to the waters of the Nile to bathe, finds a smiling infant in its floating cradle among the bulrushes, and becomes God's unconscious instrument in saving the life of one who is to deliver a nation from cruel bondage, to ascend Sinai and speak with God, and to conduct the million hosts of the chosen people, amid miracle and wonder, to the borders of the promised land. Ruth's "hap is to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz"; and this eventually raises the poor stranger to affluence, and brings her name into the golden genealogy of the Saviour of men. (*A. Thomson, D.D.*) *The stranger in the harvest field*:—1. We see how God raises up friends for His people if they really need them. If you are poor, perhaps you could tell how, when times were hard the Lord has sent you a friend in your distress. Or, in some gloomy hour, when your heart has been ready to burst with inward grief, some kind Christian friend has called upon you, into whose ear you made bold to pour all your troubles, and found unspeakable relief. 2. We may learn, too, from this part of Ruth's history, what a happy thing it is to put ourselves under the shelter of God's care. Happy, happy, those who are thus dwelling "in the secret place of the Most High, and abiding under the shadow of the Almighty," who can say, "He is my refuge and my fortress; my God, in Him will I trust." (*Bp. Orenden.*)

Ver. 4. Boaz came from Bethlehem, and said unto the reapers, The Lord be with you.—Salutation and prayer:—I. THAT IT IS A COMMENDABLE THING FOR ONE TO SALUTE ANOTHER WHEN THEY MEET. II. THAT MASTERS ARE TO PRAY THAT GOD MAY BE WITH THEIR HOUSEHOLD, FAMILY, AND WORKMEN. (*R. Bernard.*) *A good master*:—1. The

works of God's providence are very wonderful works. There is a "behold" put upon this passage. Oh, the wonderful concurrence of these occurrences! Here Ruth is ordered by Providence into Boaz's field, and Boaz is ordered by the same Providence to meet Ruth in his field; and all this in tendency to accomplish a great design of their marrying together, infinitely above both their thoughts. It would plainly astonish us to observe diligently the strange occurrences of Divine Providence, and it is our great loss to live so little in the observation of every passage and footstep thereof. 2. It is comely and commodious for masters to mind personally their own concerns. Thus Boaz here did. Wise Cato could say, "That man which minds not his vintage or harvest, the further he is from his labour, the nearer he is to his loss"; and his eyes are every way, and everywhere. (1) Upon the servants; (2) upon the reapers; (3) upon the gleaners; (4) not only looking to, but even lodging in the midst of, his labourers, if he did not also labour himself in winnowing work (chap. iii. 2, 4). 3. Christianity is no enemy to comity and courtesy; or, civil salutations are consistent with true sanctity in humane society. 4. Civil salutation ought to be paid again in the same coin, saluting for saluting. (*C. Ness.*) *Boaz the farmer.*—Farming, rather than gardening in the ordinary sense of the word, is man's oldest occupation. It may not be esteemed the most dignified one, nor may those engaged in it be generally found either the most enlightened or refined of men; still, instituted by Divine authority, and pursued by man in his primeval innocence, with the ordinances of marriage and the Sabbath-day, it is a vestige of Eden. Besides, it is probable, if not certain, that it is the one employment in which man had God for his teacher. The heathens themselves represent the gods as having taught him how to cultivate corn; and in this, as in many of their other legends, they have preserved a valuable fragment of ancient truth. There is that indeed in the nature of wheat, barley, and the other cereals, which goes almost to demonstrate that God specially created them for man's use, and originally committed them to his care. These plants are unique in two respects—first, unlike others, the fruits or roots of which we use for food, they are found wild nowhere on the face of the whole earth; and secondly, unlike others also, they cannot prolong their existence independent of man, without his care and culture. When mines are empty, and furnaces stand quenched and cold, and deep silence reigns in the caverns where the axe of the pitman sounded, the husbandman shall still plough the soil. His, the first man's, shall probably be the last man's employment. The occupation which Boaz followed rises still higher in importance when we look at the multitudes it employs. Great as we are in commerce and manufactures—clothing nations with our fabrics, covering every sea with ships, and carrying the produce of our arts to every shore—the cultivation of the soil employs a larger number of hands than any other trade. Now these interests turn to a great extent on the manner in which those who follow Boaz's occupation discharge their duties; and it is therefore a matter of thankfulness that in him the book which instructs both kings and beggars, peers and peasants, how to live, sets before us a model farmer. I. *HIS DILIGENCE IN BUSINESS.* Boaz was not one whom necessity compelled to labour. He was rich; and is indeed called "a mighty man of wealth." Yet he made that no reason for wasting his life in ease and idleness. Nor, though he employed overseers, did he consider it right to commit his business entirely into their hands. In the first place, such irresponsibility is not good for servants. It places them in circumstances of temptation to act dishonestly. Neither is it, in the second place, for the master's interests. "The eye of the master maketh a fat horse," says an English proverb. "The farmer ploughs best with his feet," says a Scotch one—his success turning on the attention he personally gives to the superintendence of his servants and the different interests of his farm. II. *HIS COURTEOUSNESS.* "Be ye courteous" is a duty which Paul—himself a fine example of it—enjoins on Christians (Acts xxvi. 12). His was courtesy to a superior; but a still finer ornament of manners, and of religion also, is courtesy to inferiors. And what a fine example of that is Boaz! It is with no cold looks, nor distant air, nor rough speech, nor haughty bearing, making his reapers painfully sensible of their inferiority—that they are servants and he their master—Boaz enters the harvest field. More beautiful than the morning, with its dews sparkling like diamonds on the grass, and its golden beams tipping the surrounding hills of Bethlehem, these morning salutations between master and servants! Loving him, they esteemed his interests their own. His conduct corresponded with his speech. Observe the eye of compassion he cast on Ruth. He paid as much honour to the virtues and feelings of this poor gleaner as if she had been the finest lady in the

land. Behold true courteousness! This grace is a great set-off to piety. As such it should be assiduously cultivated by all who desire to "adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour." III. HIS PIETY. "The Lord be with you"—his address to the reapers on entering the harvest field—has the ring of sterling metal. What a contrast Boaz offers to farmers we have known, by whose lips God's name was frequently profaned, but never honoured—their servants, like their dogs and horses, being often cursed, but never once blessed! "Like master, like man." Boaz almost never opens his mouth but pearls drop out. His speech breathes forth pious utterances. All his conversation is seasoned with grace; and, though the result of a Divine change of heart, how natural his religion seems!—not like a gala-dress assumed for the occasion—not like gum-flowers worn for ornament, but such as spring living from the sward—not like an artificial perfume that imparts a passing odour to a thing that is dead, but the odours exhaled by roses or lilies bathed in the dews of heaven. Nor was it only in the language of piety that his piety expressed itself. It did not evaporate in words. We have heard him speak; see how he acts! One night sleeping by a heap of corn, alone as he supposed, he wakes to find a woman lying at his feet. It is Ruth. Instructed by Naomi, she takes this strange Jewish fashion to seek her rights and commit her fortunes into his hands. IV. HIS CARE FOR THE MORAL AND RELIGIOUS INTERESTS OF HIS SERVANTS. Boaz in his own life set them an example of piety which could hardly fail to produce a favourable impression on their minds. Some are content to get work out of their servants; they take no interest in their souls—no more than if, like the cattle they tend, they had no souls at all. Unlike these, Boaz spoke to his servants as a God-fearing man. One who felt himself responsible to God and to their parents also, he charged himself with the care of their morals. This appears in the warnings and kind instructions he gave both to them and to Ruth. (*T. Guthrie, D.D.*) *Relations between employers and employed*.—The great operations which some in these days think fit to carry on, more for their own glory certainly than the good of their country or countrymen, entirely preclude anything like friendship between the chief and the multitude of his subordinates. It is impossible that a man who has a thousand under him should know and consider each, and there would be too much pretence in saying, "God be with you," on entering a yard or factory when otherwise no feeling is shown with which the name of God can be connected. Apart altogether from questions as to wealth and its use, every employer has a responsibility for maintaining the healthy human activity of his people, and nowhere is the immorality of the present system of huge concerns so evident as in the extinction of personal goodwill. The workman, of course, may adjust himself to the state of matters, but it will too often be by discrediting what he knows he cannot have and keeping up a critical resentful habit of mind against those who seem to treat him as a machine. He may often be wrong in his judgment of an employer. There may be less hardness of temper on the other side than there is on his own. But the conditions being what they are, one may say he is certain to be a severe critic. We have unquestionably lost much and are in danger of losing more, not in a financial sense, which matters little, but in the infinitely more important affairs of social sweetness and Christian civilisation. (*R. A. Watson, M.A.*) *On the relations that subsist amongst the different classes of society in general, and in particular the intercourse between employers and operatives*.—How lovely is the picture of this Hebrew harvest field! It has often been remarked that the Bible, in its histories, doctrines, and precepts, is suited to all nations and all times. Though written by Jews, it is written for the world; though addressed chiefly to Israel, it is framed to suit mankind. To a monarchy in one age, and a republic in another, it gives forth its saving lessons without partiality and without embarrassment. The patriarchal institutes that prevailed in the time of Boaz were very different from the political constitutions of modern Europe. The subjection of the servant to his master which prevailed in those days was very different from the freedom and equal rights of all classes in our own land. Human happiness and misery do not turn on the form which the organisation of society may assume. It is a baptism by the Spirit that will sweeten and hallow the relations of life, whatever the external form may be into which they have been cast. In view of the condition and tendencies of society, what is the duty of a Christian patriot? He is not to whine idly for the return of the good old days, when society consisted only of two classes, kind masters and happy serfs; neither is he madly to plant himself in the breach, with the view of stemming and turning the advancing tide. Let

believing men, whatever may be their views of the optimism in political organisation, fix it as an axiom in their minds that for the highest good of the species much more depends on the spirit which animates persons than on the forms which institutes may assume. Let all who hope in God and love their brethren act on this principle, and act together on it. Consider now, more particularly, the two features that characterised the intercourse between Boaz and his reapers. These are kindness and godliness; there is love of men, and there is reverence of God.

I. **KINDLINESS** is greatly to be desired in the intercourse of employers and employed in our day. The master and the men must meet often for the transaction of business that is of common concern. If the meetings be devoid of kindness, they are unpleasant and injurious. How much we suffer from harsh, supercilious pride on the one hand, and dogged, discontented pride on the other! Here is a noble field for the philanthropist to labour on. He who shall increase the kindness between operatives and their employers will be a benefactor of his race. All does not lie with the masters, but the initiative is with them. They have more in their power. We shall lose all the benefit of our vast machinery, it will be blighted by a curse, if we use living men as a part of it—if we make no distinction between the most wonderful work of God and these dead, mindless workers which our own hands have set up. Human brains have been weighed in the same balance with the dross that feeds the furnace! You take the girth of a man's soul, as you do of a wrought-iron piston, with the view of ascertaining the amount of propulsion that may be expected out of it. Both, and both alike, you put under the steam, and work them till they be worn. This is the ailment of society. Man is not a brother to man. The labourer should not fret against the employer as such. He is part of the organisation of Providence. We don't want this wheel that racks you taken out of the way. We want it oiled with holy human sympathy. But how shall we get such kindness poured out upon the too, too sharp spirits of men, when the classes meet in a bristling array of mutual suspicion and defiance? We must go to seek it in the source of all good. The sympathy of which we have been speaking is the second commandment; in order to reach it we must climb up to the first. We must begin at the beginning (Eccl. xii. 13). We are thus brought to the other leading characteristic of the intercourse depicted in the text. II. **ITS GODLINESS**. Look to the subject-matter of that kind mutual salutation, and you will find that master and men lived in the fear of God, and were not ashamed to own their religion in each other's presence. The secret lies here. There would be more of human kindness amongst us if there were more of genuine faith in God. It is here that our defect lies. In great measure God is banished from history, from politics, from merchandise, from manufactures. God is not willing to be banished from any of His works. In Him we live and move and have our being. We do not propose that at your desks or your counters you should set aside your ledgers and commence a debate on systems of theology. Everything in its own time and place. There is such a thing as doing common business in a Christian spirit, walking about on earth like one who is going home to heaven. We are very low as to the existence of godliness in the heart; and we are still lower as to the manifestation of it in the ordinary intercourse of society. Very little of it is possessed; and even that little is not brought into exercise. We are persuaded that few masters are to be found at present who would not be ashamed to acknowledge a sinner's hope in a precious Saviour in presence of their workmen; and comparatively few mechanics, who, if such an acknowledgment were made, would not openly sneer or secretly impute it to hypocrisy. The two classes distrust each other. Even the religion that they have they hide in each other's presence. Alas, the only salve is by a tacit compact kept far away from the sores of society! The motions of the community are jarring and painful, because they are not softened by Divine grace. It is a short-sighted policy to shut up religion in churches and prayer-meetings, or even in households. Religion is intended for the world. The world has need of it. There cannot in the nature of things be a proper intercourse between human beings if the fear of God and the faith of the gospel do not pervade it. How can you treat a man aright when you have in view only the lowest part of his nature—the briefest period of his destiny? If all that your mind takes in regarding him be his work and his wages—the profit and loss in money of retaining or dismissing him—your treatment of him cannot possibly be right. It is only when you learn to take in the whole man that your conception can be accurate and your conduct wise. Conclusion: 1. Those who have no chief end for their souls, and no chief aim of their lives beyond things seen and temporal, bring no godliness to bear on the business of society. You cannot

apply to a brother what you have not experienced yourself. One thing is needful. If you are not working for God, you are idle; if you have not gained your soul, you have lost all. 2. Those who are born from above bring too little godliness to bear on the common interests of life. (*W. Arnot.*) *Friendly co-operation between masters and men*:—Why do not employers take employes into their confidence? I know a gentleman very well who has over a thousand hands in his employ. I said to him some years ago, when there was great trouble in the labour market, "How are you getting on with your men?" "Oh," he said, "I have no trouble." "Why," I said, "haven't you had any strikes?" "Oh, no," he said, "I never had any trouble." "What plan do you pursue?" He said, "I will tell you. All my men know every year just how matters stand. Every little while I call them together and say, 'Now, boys, last year I made so much; this year I make less; so you see I can't pay you as much as I did last year. Now I want to know what you think I ought to have as a percentage out of this establishment, and what wages I ought to give you. You know I put all my energy in this business and risked everything, put all my fortune in it and risked everything. What do you really think I ought to have, and you ought to have?' By the time we come out of that consultation we are unanimous; there never has been an exception. When we prosper, we all prosper together; when we suffer, we all suffer together; and my men would die for me." Now, let all employers be frank with their employes. Take them into your confidence. Let them know just how matters stand. There is an immense amount of common sense in the world. It is safe always to appeal to it. (*T. De Witt Talmage.*) *Religion in the harvest field*:—1. It is remarkable that those who stand prominently forward in the lineage of our Lord according to the flesh represent the varied callings and positions of the human race; as if He who was not ashamed to call us brethren had woven into the tapestry of His human scenes threads borrowed from every skein of life, that He might be, as it were, girt with the garment of our humanity, and consequently be able entirely to sympathise with us. 2. But whilst on the one hand our blessed Lord received into Himself according to the flesh streams from every source of human life, He manifested again in His life and works the scenes from which they flowed. So that there is no employment in life but what the labourer, be he monarch, priest, or peasant, may find a practical brotherhood in Christ, and derive lessons of instruction and comfort in the hours of toil from Him who was "King of kings," "our great High Priest," and "had not where to lay His head." 3. The leading lesson which Boaz teaches us is the sanctity of every earthly occupation when pursued by the servant of God. The real greatness of any man's work consists in its being done according to the standard and limits of religion; and the absence of consciousness or religious expression is no sign of the unreality of real religious principle. 4. In the country, a large portion of whose population is agricultural, the conduct and character of the farmer or the landed proprietor is of no small consequence. He can improve or deteriorate the race of the labourer, he can elevate or depress multitudes of those around him, by the way in which he acts; and we are bound to believe that to a great degree God blesses the crops and the harvest according to the character of those connected with them. 5. The position of Boaz is one which silences all possible objections. He was no inferior farmer who could afford to be religious because he had not the opportunity of speculation, "for he was a mighty man of wealth." He was not ashamed to recognise God, while, alas! how many amongst us of a similar class have not the courage to acknowledge to those they employ that they recognise God as the source and author of all that they possess. The example of the master will be followed by the man; if he puts religion forward in the front of his intercourse with his labourers, he will set the fashion to the field, the farmyard, and the cottager's home. The foreman will own God, and the reaper will "catch the trick" of reverence. It would seem as if some men imagined that some chance hand opened the womb of the teeming earth. It is to such men that God says, "They did not know that I gave the corn; therefore will I return and take away My corn, I will destroy her vines and her fig-trees" (Hos. ii. 9). But in the stately and almost sublime interview between Boaz and his reapers we find a practical suggestion also—why should not farmers not only recognise God and religion, but do something to realise the connection between God and themselves? 6. Another striking feature in the conduct of Boaz is the care that he takes of the purity of unmarried women when at work in his fields; for Boaz said unto Ruth, "Have I not charged the young men that they shall not touch thee? Go not to glean in another field, but abide here fast

by my maidens." It would almost seem as if the young men and young women worked in different fields. How lamentable is the contrast of a picture like this with that displayed by the estates of our farmers in seedtime, hay harvest and corn harvest. Imagine the long tale of shameful and miserable life that many a woman wrecked early on the quicksand of impurity has to tell upon her death-bed, and too often connects it all with the first hint given in the field in which God's merciful hand was most singularly manifested in scattering His bounties. 7. But there is one more point full of instruction in the conduct of Boaz—his consideration of the gleaners. Some farmers close their gates altogether against the gleaner, and many are strict in their injunctions that but little shall be left for the poor. Yet surely the prayers of the poor, when genuine and honest, bring a blessing upon all around them, and what is given to them is but a loan to God. (*E. Monro, M.A.*) *Business to be sanctified by religion*:—Our forefathers symbolised a beautiful truth when in our old market towns they erected a market cross. As if to teach the buyers and sellers to order their actions and to sanctify their gains by the remembrance of a crucified Saviour. In the orders which God gave for the encampment of Israel during their pilgrimage to Canaan it was provided that every part of the camp looked towards the tabernacle. And thus God taught them ever to remember that He was in their midst, and that before Him they must walk day by day. (*Aubrey C. Price, B.A.*) *Piety with courtesy*:—Piety not only stands with humanity and civil courtesy, but also exacteth and requireth it (Matt. xii. ; 1 Pet. iii. 8 ; Luke x. 5). God hath His ethics, and commandeth good manners as well as good conscience. Affability and courtesy is the way to win others ; men's minds are taken with it, as passengers' eyes are with fair flowers in the springtide ; whereas a harsh, sullen, sour, churlish conversation is very distasteful to all, galleth the best (witness David, 1 Sam. xxv.), and openeth bad men's mouths to speak evil of religion. (*J. Trapp.*)

Vers. 5-7. Then said Boaz unto his servant, . . . Whose damsel is this ? And the servant . . . said, It is the Moabitish damsel.—*The welcome reception*:—We can imagine many ways in which Boaz and Ruth might have been made acquainted with each other. But surely none which would have been better adapted to awaken the deepest and tenderest mutual interest in the mind of each. She appears in all the loveliness of virtuous modesty, humbly toiling for a mother's support and comfort, though unused to labour. He appears before her clothed with dignity and benevolence. We are now to witness their first mutual introduction, and the welcome reception which he gives to her. First we have the rich kinsman's notice of her, addressed to his head servant. Extensive as are the concerns of Boaz, the poor stranger whom the Lord hath led there is not forgotten. Happy indeed is such prosperity as this ! The heart is not lifted up, the spirit is not made selfish and arrogant. There is a tender care for the poor maintained amidst the enjoyments and luxuries of wealth. Thus the Saviour comes to visit His earthly field, and calls the servants whom He has set over it to account for their charge. His ministers watch for souls as they who must give an account. Not the poorest stranger is unnoticed or forgotten by Him. Jesus may be considered as asking His ministers continually, of one and another in their flock, "Who is that ?" What a dying reflection was that of the eminent Archbishop Williams in the reign of Charles I. : "I have passed through many places of honour and trust, both in Church and State, more than any of my order in England, this seventy years before. But were I assured that by my preaching I had converted but one soul unto God, I should take therein more spiritual joy and comfort than in all the honours and offices which have been bestowed upon me." This question of Boaz brings us to the reply which the servant makes. He is not inquired of in vain. He has made himself acquainted with the whole history of Ruth. And in giving his account he uses great skill and kindness in setting forth the advantageous circumstances of her case. He tells of her origin ; of her return, her emigration from Moab to Israel ; of her need—her poverty compelled her to beg permission to glean ; of her gentle humility ; of her perseverance. His account is marked by the evidence of the utmost kindness and compassion. When we think of this as an illustration of the account we may give of some daughters of the Lord Almighty who are committed to our charge, how appropriate seems the whole story. To create and maintain a familiar and intimate acquaintance with the members of the flock committed to him is a most important instrument of usefulness to a faithful pastor. The whole influence and value of his ministry will be greatly dependent on this

knowledge of his people. Suppose I could say of all the youthful females in the field around me, as each one severally appeared for my account, "This also was a daughter of Moab, but she has come back." How applicable to them would become Paul's account of the Corinthian Christians, "Such were you, but ye have been washed, ye have been justified, ye have been sanctified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." She has come back. The answer of the servant of Boaz leads us to Boaz's own address to the lonely stranger. How kindly and freely he welcomes her to his ample provisions! And lest she should not understand the openness of his invitation, he calls her attention particularly to this fact of her entire welcome to every provision there. The Saviour's grace is thus open and free. Whosoever will may take of the water of life freely. Here are abundant supplies of all that you can desire or ask; and all given without recompense or hope of return from you. He urges her to remain in the field to which the gracious providence of God had sent her: "Go not to glean in another field." Our gracious Kinsman feels equally jealous of any partnership or competition in His work of grace for you. He lets you know that if you attempt to be saved in any other way Christ shall profit you nothing. There is salvation in none other. There is no field in which you can gather happiness, and rest, and abiding peace, but the field of Christ. Well may we apply to you Boaz's address, "Go not from hence. Abide here fast by my maidens. Let thine eyes be on the field that they do reap, and go thou after them." Nothing is more important for your religious character than appropriate religious society. The examples and influence of faithful people of God are a precious help to you in your Christian course. Be the companion always of those who fear God, and turn away your feet from the paths of evil men. The landmarks among these various fields, which separate them from the field which the Lord hath blessed, may not be always perfectly distinct and apparent to you. Try no experiment how far you may go towards these strange fields and return in safety. Dwell in the heart of the land, and make the fact always sure, that you are with the Lord and His chosen flock. Here you have every promise of protection and supply. Your gracious Kinsman has charged His ministers to help and guide you, not to hurt or hinder you. Ruth's humble and grateful answer to her unknown kinsman may conclude our present thoughts. "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 shouldst take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger?" What deep humility! What consciousness of need! What confession of her own unworthiness! What affectionate gratitude for the kindness he has displayed! It is just so that the loving-kindness of the Lord humbles the pardoned sinner to the dust. (*S. H. Tyng, D.D.*) **Hath continued even from the morning until now.**—*Ruth's industry prompted by love*:—Ruth had spent no more time under covert than was absolutely necessary for enabling her to return to her labours. "It is vain to rise up early and sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows." We ought to consult our health in carrying on our labours, and not to make them a burden too heavy for us to bear. When covetous desires of gain induce men to overwork their powers, they sacrifice their health to Mammon, whom they have chosen for their God. But Ruth was labouring for her mother as well as herself. Her love to Naomi would give her spirits and strength to endure the heat of the climate. (*G. Lawson.*)

Vers. 8, 9. **Then said Boaz unto Ruth, Hearest thou not, my daughter? Go not to glean in another field.**—*Loving-kindness*:—1. There may be an hearing without an heeding. 2. Loving-kindness to necessitous persons ought not to be shown in word and tongue only, but also in deed and truth (1 John iii. 1). Boaz's kindness was real, as well as verbal. Mouth-mercy and lip-love is good, cheap, and aboundeth everywhere in our age. God is kinder to those that glean in His gospel-fields than ever Boaz was to Ruth; He will not put us off with mouth-mercy only, but will make Himself known by His name Jehovah as well as by His name of God Almighty. 3. God's gleaners should have their proper and peculiar gospel-fields to glean in. They should not go to glean in the fields of strangers (John x. 5, 8). They have their senses exercised to discern good and evil (Heb. v. 14). They have a spirit of discerning (1 Cor. xii. 10) whereby they do discern the mind of Christ (1 Cor. ii. 16). This makes them hate every false way (Psa. cxix. 104). (*C. Ness.*) **Let thine eyes be on the field that they do reap.**—*Harvest lessons (for the Young)*:—1. THE MANIFESTATION OF WHAT IS HIDDEN IN HUMAN LIFE. In the early spring the buried seed-corn was completely hidden. You could get no answer to such

questions as, What sort? How much? Is it germinating or rotting? The reply would be, Wait. Harvest will reveal. So in human character. Thoughts, and wishes, and life-bias are often concealed. The good, through failure, seems bad; the bad, through hypocrisy, good. There shall be an unveiling. Contact with Christ brings out, in conversion and in judgment, many surprises in human character. "There is nothing hid that shall not be known." II. THE INCREASE OF WHAT IS SMALL IN HUMAN LIFE. What contrast between the seeds and the sheaf. What growth, "some sixty-fold, some an hundred-fold." So with the greatest thing in human history, Christianity. The babe, becoming the sovereign of the race. So with good and evil in human lives. The thought growing to wish, wish to resolve, resolve to deed, deed to habit, habit to influence that is immeasurable. "Who hath despised the day of small things?" III. THE RETRIBUTION FOR WHAT IS DONE IN HUMAN LIFE. In the destiny of tares and wheat, Christ teaches souls to read their retribution. It is the outcome of the life. Hell and heaven are the perfect outgrowth, the harvest of character. The good shall ripen to glory, the evil to shame. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap: he that soweth to the flesh," &c. IV. THE PASSING AWAY OF OPPORTUNITY IN HUMAN LIFE. Each season gives its own chances. V. THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD OVER THE WHOLE OF HUMAN LIFE. He cares for human life, and through frosts and summer heats, storms and mid-nights, matures the Christly soul. "All things work together for good." (*Urijah R. Thomas.*) **Have I not charged the young men.—Masters and servants:—** 1. Here we see that servile natures are most prone and proclive to wrong poor strangers. Indeed, generous spirits disdain to make those the subjects of their cruelty which rather should be the objects of their pity; but it complies with a servile disposition to tyrannise over such poor people as cannot resist them. Like petty brooks pent within a narrow channel, on every dash of rain they are ready to overflow, and wax angry at the apprehension of the smallest distaste. 2. From these words observe, that it is the part of a good master not only to do no harm himself, but also to take order that his servants do none (*Gen. xii. 20 and xxvi. 11*). 3. In these words Boaz doth intimate that if he gave a charge to the contrary none of his servants durst presume once to molest her. If he, a mere earthly master, could procure such obedience to his commands, surely if the Lord of heaven enjoins us anything we ought to do it without any doubt or delay. (*T. Fuller, B.D.*)

Ver. 10. **Then she fell on her face, and bowed herself to the ground.—The lowly attitude of a grateful heart:—**I. WHAT DEEP AND TOUCHING HUMILITY IS EXPRESSED HERE. II. WHAT AFFECTIONATE GRATITUDE IS HERE. III. WHAT CONFESSIONS OF UNWORTHINESS ARE HERE. IV. WHAT CONSCIOUSNESS OF NEED IS HERE. (*W. Barendale.*) **Ruth's humility and gratitude:—**What had Boaz done for Ruth that she falls down on her knees and thanks him for his favours in language expressive of such warm gratitude? He had assured her of his protection. He had invited her to gather the gleanings of his corn, and to drink of his water. And what thanks do we give to Him who invites us to come and buy wine and milk from Him without money and without price? Ruth thought herself greatly honoured by the attentions of Boaz. She was a stranger and foreigner, an alien to the commonwealth of Israel, and did not reckon herself entitled to any kindness from the people of the Lord. The humble are always disposed to be thankful, and therefore they are always happy. When men are swelled with such a sense of their own merit that they think themselves entitled to everything, they will never be pleased. But you can scarcely displease the humble man, because he thinks anything better than he deserves. He enjoys peace in his own bosom, because his expectations are seldom disappointed. He acquires the goodwill of all around him, because he is thankful for the smallest favours, and not dissatisfied when he meets with none. (*G. Lawson.*)

Ver. 11. **It hath fully been shewed me, all that thou hast done unto thy mother-in-law.—The praise of virtue:—**I. THAT VIRTUE SHALL NOT WANT TRUMPETERS TO SOUND OUT HER PRAISES TO THE FULL (*Psa. xxxvii. 6*). II. THAT WELL-DOING PROCURETH FAVOUR TO THE POOR, THOUGH STRANGERS, AT THE HANDS OF THE VIRTUOUS; for this was the cause of Boaz's love to Ruth, as here he acknowledged; and this is true godliness, to love others for their goodness. (*R. Bernard.*) **The gracious approbation:—**Ruth begins now to reap the abundant harvest which is growing for her in the Divine purposes of mercy—a harvest of which Boaz's fields are only a part, and of which indeed all that Boaz possessed was but a feeble

illustration. She had been faithful in that which appeared to be the least, and now she was to be rewarded with that which seemed to be much. We have first to remark upon the gracious approbation which Boaz bestows upon her whole history, though he knew not her personally. It is thus you may often think yourself unknown, and unobserved in your efforts to do right in your different relations of life, when there are many eyes upon you, watching your character, and many ears may be listening to what the Lord has enabled you thus to do for Him. Give yourself no concern about this. God, your guardian and protector, will see that you have all the reputation and recompense which is good for you. Ruth supposed herself concealed in the field of Boaz. But he declares to her that her faithfulness to Naomi had been fully related to him, and he knew her well. Thus the Saviour recounts to His people, and for them, the acts of their life which have manifested their love to Him. Nothing that you do is worthy the Saviour's notice. But nothing that you really do for Him will be unnoticed by Him. You will never be rewarded for your works. But you will be judged by your works. They are the proofs of your faith, as the fruits on the tree are the evidences of its character and its worth. Certainly there is nothing on earth so blessed and so precious as the approbation of our Divine Master, speaking in our own hearts, of the service we have feebly but sincerely tried to render to Him. But Boaz not only expresses approbation, he also speaks of recompense to Ruth. She shall not be unrewarded. Naomi may not be able to do anything for her. But Naomi has other paymasters in the Lord's employ beside herself. Our acts of benevolence and love for Christ's sake can never go without their result of blessing even in this life. The merciful man doeth good to his own soul. We comfort the needy and the sorrowing, and we are thus preparing comforters for ourselves in the persons of others whom the Lord will raise up to minister to our wants. We aid the children of the poor, and we are laying up a heritage for our children in the kindness of others whom we know not. But apart from this result of recompense, there is also our own happiness in the work itself. "It is more blessed," that is, it is happier, a happier state and habit of mind, a happier condition of feeling and thought, "to give than to receive." Whatever we do in kindness to others for Christ's sake He returns to us in our own secret personal enjoyments. He ministers to us a peace and blessedness in the work which is our inward possession, and which comes to us without any reference to outward results. But Boaz prays for more than recompense: "A full reward be given thee," &c. For full rewards in any course of human life we must look beyond the present state of being. The Saviour says of the objects of beneficent action, "They cannot recompense thee, but thou shalt be recompensed in the resurrection of the just." Whatever results come now from any of the acts of life, they are extremely partial. The final results are yet to be revealed. The abundant harvest is to be gathered hereafter. But it will be surely gathered. The Saviour shall Himself minister to those who have been faithful to Him here, an abundant recompense, a full reward. But while the Saviour thus animates and encourages His disciples with the blessed hope before them, see how the answer of Ruth to Boaz illustrates their self-renouncing mind. The more generously a noble mind is dealt with, the more humble and unassuming does it become. This is eminently the case with the children of God when their Divine Redeemer comforts and blesses them. Never do they feel so perfectly unworthy as when He pours the special ministration of the oil of gladness into their souls. But all this only increases their sense of their own unworthiness of such mercy. And their cry and prayer is, that they may still find favour in His sight—that He would look upon them with eyes of mercy, and think of them according to His own grace and not according to their merits. Boaz's gracious provisions for the lonely stranger crown and close this instructive interview. Was any conduct of man ever more delicate, dignified, or beautiful? But it is only a feeble illustration of the riches of a Saviour's grace. (*S. H. Tyng, D.D.*)

Ver. 12. The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee.—Ruth's reward; or, cheer for converts:—I. WHAT HAS THE YOUNG CONVERT DONE? We illustrate the subject by the instance of Ruth. 1. Many young converts deserve encouragement because they have left all their old associates. Ruth, no doubt, had many friends in her native country, but she tore herself away to cling to Naomi and her God. 2. Next, Ruth, having left her old companions, had come amongst strangers. She knew Naomi, but in the whole town of Bethlehem she knew no one else. She felt herself to be alone, though under the wings of Israel's

God. Boaz very properly felt that she should not think that courtesy and kindness had died out of Israel; and he made a point, though he was by far her superior in station, to go to her and speak a word of encouragement to her. Come, let us pluck up courage, and encourage every Ruth when she is timid among strangers. Let us help her to feel at home in Immanuel's land. 3. The new convert is like Ruth in another respect: he is very lowly in his own eyes. Ruth had little self-esteem, and therefore she won the esteem of others. She felt herself to be a very inconsiderable person, to whom any kindness was a great favour; and so do young converts, if they are real and true. 4. Once more, the young convert is like Ruth because he has come to trust under the wings of Jehovah, the God of Israel. This is what our young converts have done: they have come, not to trust themselves, but to trust in Jesus. They have come to find a righteousness in Christ—aye, to find everything in Him. II. WHAT IS THE FULL REWARD OF THOSE WHO COME TO TRUST UNDER THE WINGS OF GOD? I would answer that a full reward will come to us in that day when we lay down these bodies of flesh, that they may sleep in Jesus, while our unclothed spirits are absent from the body but present with the Lord. But there is a present reward, and to that Boaz referred. There is in this world a present recompense for the godly, notwithstanding the fact that many are the afflictions of the righteous. Even in losing the present life for Christ's sake we are saving it, and self-denial and taking up the cross are but forms of blessedness. Do you ask me, "How shall we be rewarded for trusting in the Lord?" 1. I answer, first, by the deep peace of conscience which He will grant you. Can any reward be better than this? That, however, is only the beginning of the believer's reward. 2. He that has come to trust in God shall be "quiet from fear of evil." What a blessing that must be! "He shall not be afraid of evil tidings; his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord." 3. More than this: the man who trusts in God rests in Him with respect to all the supplies he now needs, or shall ever need. 4. Another part of the believer's great gain lies in the consciousness that all things are working together for his good. Nothing is, after all, able to injure us. Neither pains of body, nor sufferings of mind, nor losses in business, nor cruel blows of death, can work us real ill. Is not this a reward for which a man may well forego the flatteries of sin? 5. Then, let me tell you, they that trust in God and follow Him have another full reward, and that is, the bliss of doing good. Can any happiness excel this? 6. Many other items make up the full of the reward; but perhaps the chief of all is communion with God. III. WHAT FIGURE SETS FORTH THIS FULL REWARD? I do not think that Boaz knew the full meaning of what he said. He could not foresee all that was appointed of the Lord. In the light of Ruth's history we will read the good man's blessing. This poor stranger, Ruth, in coming to put her trust in the God of Israel, was giving up everything; yes, but she was also gaining everything. Ah! when you come to trust in Christ, you find in the Lord Jesus Christ one who is next of kin to you, who redeems your heritage, and unites you to Himself. (C. H. Spurgeon.) *God's reward*:—A military gentleman once said to an excellent old minister in the North of Scotland, who was becoming infirm, "Why, if I had power over the pension list, I would have you put on half-pay for your long and faithful services." He replied, "Ah, my friend, your master may put you off with half-pay, but my Master will not serve me so meanly—He will give me full-pay. Through grace I expect a full reward." **Under whose wings thou art come to trust.**—*The wings of God*:—1. They were swift wings under which Ruth had come to trust. There is nothing in all the handiwork of God more curious than a bird's wing. You have been surprised sometimes to see how far a bird can fly with one stroke of the wings; and, when it has food in prospect, or when it is affrighted, the pulsations of the bird's wings are unimaginable for velocity. The English lords used to pride themselves on the speed of their falcons. These birds, when trained, had in them the dart of the lightning. How swift were the carrier-pigeons in the time of Anthony and at the siege of Jerusalem! Wonderful speed! A carrier-pigeon was thrown up at Rouen and came down at Ghent—ninety miles off—in one hour. The carrier-pigeons were the telegraphs of the olden time. Swallows have been shot in our latitude having the undigested rice of Georgia swamps in their crops, showing that they had come four hundred miles in six hours. It has been estimated that, in the ten years of a swallow's life, it flies far enough to have gone round the world eighty-nine times, so great is its velocity. And so the wings of the Almighty, spoken of in the text, are swift wings. They are swift when they drop upon the

foe, and swift when they come to help God's friends. 2. The wings under which Ruth had come to trust were very broad wings. There have been eagles shot on the Rocky Mountains with wings that were seven feet from tip to tip. When the king of the air sits on the crag the wings are spread over all the eaglets in the cyrie, and when the eagle starts from the rock the shadow is like the spreading of a storm cloud. So the wings of God are broad wings. They cover up all our wants, all our sorrows, all our sufferings. He puts one wing over our cradle, and He puts the other over our grave. Yes, it is not a desert in which we are placed; it is a nest. Sometimes it is a very hard nest, like that of the eagle, spread on the rock, with ragged moss and rough sticks, but still it is a nest; and, although it may be very hard under us, over us are the wings of the Almighty. 3. The wings under which Ruth came to trust were strong wings. The strength of a bird's wing—of a sea-fowl's wing, for example—you might guess from the fact that sometimes for five, six, or seven days it seems to fly without resting. There have been condors in the Andes that could overcome an ox or a stag. There have been eagles that have picked up children and swung them to the top of the cliffs. The flap of an eagle's wing has death in it. There are birds whose wings are packed with strength to fly, to lift, to destroy. So the wings of God are strong wings. Mighty to save. Mighty to destroy. 4. The wings under which Ruth had come to trust were gentle wings. There is nothing softer than a feather. You have noticed when a bird returns from flight how gently it stoops over the nest. The young birds are not afraid of having their lives trampled out by the mother-bird; the old whip-poor-will drops into its nest of leaves, the oriole into its casket of bark, the humming-bird into its hammock of moss, gentle as the light. And so, says the psalmist, He shall cover thee with His wing. Oh, the gentleness of God! But even that figure does not fully set it forth; for I have sometimes looked into the bird's nest and seen a dead bird, its life having been trampled out by the mother-bird. But no one that ever came under the feathers of the Almighty was trodden on. Blessed nest! warm nest! Why will men stay out in the cold to be shot of temptation and to be chilled by the blast, when there is this Divine shelter? (*T. De Witt Talmage.*) *Jehovah's wings*:—Some have imagined the reference to be to a hen, beneath whose wings her little birds flee for shelter and warmth, according to one memorable and touching comparison used by our Lord (*Luke xiii. 34*). It has been suggested by others that the allusion is to the mercy-seat in the holy of holies in the ancient tabernacle, over which the wings of the cherubim stretched from the one extremity to the other, and above which the Divine glory shone with benignant radiance. Nothing could be more sublimely descriptive of dedication to the service of the true God—committing oneself to Him for providential protection and salvation, and seeking the loving fellowship of His Church—than “coming to trust beneath Jehovah's wings.” (*A. Thomson, D.D.*)

Ver. 13. *Let me find favour in thy sight, my lord; for that thou hast comforted me.*—*Good from encouraging words*:—Is there not a useful suggestion in all this to persons in places of authority and influence? There is sometimes a grievous fault in withholding praise from others. At the fountain-head of some of our greatest rivers a slight touch of the hand or foot would be sufficient to determine the course in which they should ever afterwards flow. And, in like manner, a kind word spoken to another at a moment when the heart is ready to faint may be the means of dispelling the chill of despondency, of stimulating the efforts of an honest industry, of confirming good resolutions, and of helping to fix the future destiny of a brother. Some persons are far too much afraid of the effect of a little generous and well-timed praise. They would keep all their flowers in an ice-house. Letting in a little sunshine upon them at times would not be amiss. Let masters and parents and teachers try the experiment of what an encouraging word or look can sometimes do. Let it be distinctly seen by those whom they can influence that they are on the side of whatever is virtuous in effort, noble in aim, and heavenward in aspiration. (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 14. *At mealtime come thou hither.*—*The common meal*:—1. It should indicate the Divine hand in providing it. 2. It should minister to the calm contentment of our hearts. 3. It should indicate a self-respect before men. 4. It should prepare for the next duties in life. (*E. Price.*) *Mealtime in the corn-fields*:—I. THAT GOD'S REAPERS HAVE THEIR MEALTIMES. The reapers in Jesus'

fields shall not only receive a blessed reward at the last, but they shall have plentiful comforts by the way. 1. God has ordained certain mealtimes for His reapers; and He has appointed that one of these shall be when they come together to listen to the Word preached. When the Lord blesses the provisions of His house, no matter how many thousands there may be, all His poor shall be filled with bread. 2. Often, too, our gracious Lord appoints us mealtimes in our private readings and meditations. Here it is that His "paths drop fatness." No wonder that men grow so slowly, when they meditate so little. We must take the truth, and turn it over and over again in the inward parts of our spirit, and so shall we extract suitable nourishment therefrom. 3. Let us not forget that there is one specially ordained mealtime which ought to occur at least once in the week—I mean the Supper of the Lord. There you have literally, as well as spiritually, a meal. 4. Besides these regular mealtimes, there are others which God gives us, at seasons when, perhaps, we little expect them. You have been walking the street, and suddenly you have felt a holy flowing out of your soul toward God; or in the middle of business your heart has been melted with love and made to dance for joy, even as the brooks, which have been bound with winter's ice, leap to feel the touch of spring. You have been groaning, dull, and earthbound; but the sweet love of Jesus has unwrapped your heart when you scarce thought of it. Seasons, too, we have had on our sick-beds. 5. Let me observe that, while these mealtimes come, we know not exactly when, there are certain seasons when we may expect them. The Eastern reapers generally sit down under the shelter of a tree, or a booth, to take refreshment during the heat of the day. And certain I am, that when trouble, affliction, persecution, and bereavement become the most painful to us, it is then that the Lord hands out to us the sweetest comforts. Again, these mealtimes frequently occur before a trial. Sweet cordials prepare for stern conflicts. Times of refreshing also occur after trouble or arduous service. Christ was tempted of the devil, and afterwards angels came and ministered unto Him. After conflict, content; after battle, banquet. When thou hast waited on thy Lord, then thou shalt sit down, and thy Master will gird Himself and wait upon thee. II. TO THESE MEALS THE GLEANER IS AFFECTIONATELY INVITED. That is to say, the poor trembling stranger who has not strength enough to reap, who has no right to be in the field except the right of charity—the poor, trembling sinner, conscious of his own demerit, and feeling but little hope and little joy, is invited to the feast of love. 1. In the text the gleaner is invited to come: "At mealtime come thou hither." We trust none of you will be kept away from the place of holy feasting by any shame on account of your dress, or your personal character, or your poverty; nay, nor even on account of your physical infirmities. 2. Moreover, she was bidden not only to come, but to eat. Whatever there is sweet and comfortable in the Word of God, ye that are of a broken and contrite spirit are invited to partake of it. You are saying in your heart, "Oh, that I could eat the children's bread!" You may eat it. You say, "I have no right." But the Lord gives you the invitation! Come without any other right than the right of His invitation. 3. Note further, that she was not only invited to eat the bread, but to dip her morsel in the vinegar. The Lord's reapers have sauce with their bread; they have not merely doctrines, but the holy unction which is the essence of doctrines; they have not merely truths, but a hallowed delight accompanies the truths. III. BOAZ REACHES HER THE PARCHED CORN. None but the Lord of the harvest can hand out the choicest refreshments of spiritual minds. How does He do this? 1. By His gracious Spirit He first of all inspires your faith. 2. Having done this, the Saviour does more; He sheds abroad the love of God in your heart. 3. But Jesus does more than this: He reaches the parched corn with His own hand, when He gives us close communion with Himself. 4. Yet once more let me add, the Lord Jesus is pleased to reach the parched corn, in the best sense, when the Spirit gives us the infallible witness within that we are "born of God." Philip de Morny, who lived in the time of Prince Henry of Navarre, was wont to say that the Holy Spirit had made his own salvation to him as clear a point as a problem demonstrated in Euclid. The sun in the heavens is not more clear to the eye than his present salvation to an assured believer; such a man could as soon doubt his own existence as suspect his possession of eternal life. IV. AFTER BOAZ HAD REACHED THE PARCHED CORN, WE ARE TOLD THAT "SHE DID EAT, AND WAS SUFFICED, AND LEFT." So shall it be with every Ruth. Sooner or later every penitent shall become a believer, every mourner a singer. 1. "She did eat, and was sufficed." Your head shall be satisfied with the precious truth which Christ reveals; your

heart shall be content with Jesus, as the altogether lovely object of affection; your hope shall be filled, for whom have you in heaven but Christ? Your desire shall be satiated, for what can even your desire hunger for more than "to know Christ, and to be found in Him"? You shall find Jesus charm your conscience, till it is at perfect peace; He shall content your judgment, till you know the certainty of His teachings; He shall supply your memory with recollections of what He did, and gratify your imagination with the prospects of what He is yet to do. 2. "She was sufficed, and left." Some of us have had deep draughts of love; we have thought that we could take in all of Christ, but when we have done our best, we have had to leave a vast remainder. There are certain sweet things in the Word of God which you and I have not enjoyed yet, and which we cannot enjoy yet; and these we are obliged to leave for a while, till we are better prepared to receive them. Did not our Lord say, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now"? There is a special knowledge to which we have not attained, a place of intimate fellowship with Christ which we have not yet occupied. There is yet a beyond, and there will be for ever. 3. A verse or two further on we are told what Ruth did with her leanings. It is very wrong, I believe, at feasts to carry anything home with you; but she was not under any such regulation, for that which was left she took home and gave to Naomi. So it shall be even with you, poor tremblers, who think you have no right to a morsel for yourselves; you shall be allowed to eat, and when you are quite sufficed, you shall have courage to bear away a portion to others who are hungering at home. When you hear a sermon you think, "My poor mother cannot get out to-day; how I wish she could have been here, for that sentence would have comforted her. If I forget everything else, I will tell her that." Cultivate an unselfish spirit. Seek to love as you have been loved. (C. H. Spurgeon.)

Vers. 15, 16. **Let her glean even among the sheaves.**—*Spiritual gleanings* :—

I. The God of the whole earth is a GREAT HUSBANDMAN. This is true in natural things. As a matter of fact all farm operations are carried on by His power and prudence. In spiritual matters God is a great Husbandman; and there, too, all His works are done for His children, that they may be fed upon the finest of the wheat. Permit me to speak of the wide gospel-fields which our heavenly Father farms for the good of His children. Every field which our heavenly Father tills yields a plentiful harvest, for there are no failures or famines with Him. 1. One part of His farm is called doctrine field. What full sheaves of finest wheat are to be found there! Gospel doctrine is always safe doctrine. You may feast upon it till you are full, and no harm will come of it. Be afraid of no revealed truth. 2. The great Husbandman has another field called promise field; of that I shall not need to speak, for I hope you often enter and glean from it. The whole field is your own, every ear of it; you may draw out from the sheaves themselves, and the more you take the more you may. 3. Then there is ordinance field; a great deal of good wheat grows in this field. In all the estate no field is to be found to rival this centre and crown of all the domain: this is the King's acre. Gospel gleaner, abide in that field; glean in it on the first day of every week, and expect to see your Lord there; for it is written, "He was known of them in the breaking of bread." 4. Fellowship and communion with Christ. This is the field for the Lord's choicest ones to glean in. II. A HUMBLE GLEANER. 1. The believer is a favoured gleaner, for he may take home a whole sheaf, if he likes: he may bear away all that he can possibly carry, for all things are freely given him of the Lord. Alas, our faith is so little that we rather glean than reap; we are straitened in ourselves, not in our God. May you all outgrow the metaphor, and come home, bringing your sheaves with you. 2. Again, we may remark that the gleaner, in her business has to endure much toil and fatigue. I know a friend who walks five miles every Sunday to hear the gospel, and has the same distance to return. Another thinks little of a ten miles' journey; and these are wise, for to hear the pure Word of God no labour is extravagant. 3. We remark, next, that every ear the gleaner gets she has to stoop for. We will go down on our knees in prayer, and stoop by self-humiliation and confession of ignorance, and so gather with the hand of faith the daily bread of our hungering souls. 4. Note, in the next place, that what a gleaner gets she wins ear by ear; occasionally she picks up a handful at once, but as a rule it is straw by straw. Now, where there are handfuls to be got at once, there is the place to go and glean; but if you cannot meet with such abundance, be glad to gather ear by ear. That is a sorry ministry which

yields nothing. Go and glean where the Lord has opened the gate for you. Why the text alone is worth the journey; do not miss it. 5. Note, next, that what the gleaner picks up she keeps in her hand; she does not drop the corn as fast as she gathers it. Be attentive, but be retentive too. Gather the grain and tie it up in bundles for carrying away with you, and mind you do not lose it on the road home. Do not lose by trifling talk that which may make you rich to all eternity. 6. Then, again, the gleaner takes the wheat home and threshes it. It is a wise thing to thresh a sermon whoever may have been the preacher, for it is certain that there is a portion of straw and chaff about it. Many thresh the preacher by finding needless fault; but that is not half so good as threshing the sermon to get out of it the pure truth. 7. And then, in the last place, the good woman, after threshing the corn, no doubt winnowed it. Ruth did all this in the field; but you can scarcely do so. You must do some of the work at home. Separate between the precious and the vile, and let the worthless material go where it may; you have no use for it, and the sooner you are rid of it the better. Judge with care; reject false teaching with decision, and retain true doctrine with earnestness, so shall you practise the enriching art of heavenly gleanings. III. A GRACIOUS PERMISSION GIVEN: "Let her glean among the sheaves, and reproach her not." We have no right to any heavenly blessings of ourselves; our portion is due to free and sovereign grace. I tell you the reasons that moved Boaz's heart to let Ruth go among the sheaves. The master motive was because he loved her. He would have her go there because he had conceived an affection for her, which he afterwards displayed in grander ways. So the Lord lets His people come and glean among the sheaves, because He loves them. There was another reason why Boaz allows Ruth to glean among the sheaves; it was because he was her relative. This is why our Lord gives us choice favours at times, and takes us into His banqueting-house in so gracious a manner. He is our next of kin, bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh. Oh, child of God, never be afraid to glean! Have faith in God, and take the promises home to yourself. Jesus will rejoice to see you making free with His good things. (C. H. Spurgeon.) *The benevolence of Boaz*:—This benevolence of Boaz seems to me to have two lessons in it: one practical—how we should do our benevolence; and one theological—how God does His benevolence. You will see, in the first place, that Boaz does not give her the wheat. Generous as he is, she earns what she gets. He does not send her back home and send the young men with sheaves after her; he lets her work for what she receives. To give something for nothing is always a dangerous piece of business. Sometimes we must do it, it is true, but it is not the ideal kind of benevolence. If you desire to do something for the poor that will endure, let them do something to earn that which they receive from you. And yet while Boaz thus allows her to earn what she receives, so that she is no pauper, no beggar, has no self-respect taken away from her, he does it largely and with a great, generous mood, not in a niggardly way. But, most of all, he gives her secretly. Boaz anticipated Christ. A great many years before Christ had said, "Let not your right hand know what your left hand does," Boaz practised that maxim. He hid his benevolence from this woman, and Boaz enjoyed the benevolence all the more because she did not understand it. In our benevolence let us maintain the self-respect of those we aid; let us not make paupers of them; and strive how we can do the most good with the least possible display. That is not the ordinary rule, but it is a good one. But this story of the benevolence of Boaz is also a parable. It indicates the way in which God does His good works among men. Did you ever think how true it is that God also maintains our self-respect when He gives to us—how very little He gives unless we do something to get the gift? When we pray for bread for our need, He does not give us the bread; He gives us a piece of land, and a plough, and a hoe, and we must sweat for the bread. When we pray for clothing, He does not send the clothing; He gives us that out of which we can by our own industry make the clothing. It is certainly true in the material realm. It is true in the intellectual realm. The world is full of wisdom, full of the resources out of which wisdom is gathered; but we must gather it; we cannot get our wisdom ready-made. It is not handed to us. And this is equally true in the spiritual realm. God no more hands the bread of life ready-made than He hands the material bread ready-made. But how generously He gives to those who are willing to work for Him, and take that given in that spirit which preserves the self-respect while receiving the benevolence! We cut down the forests and find the coal-mine; we exhaust the ocean of its whales and find gas and electricity to take their place;

and now the scientific men are discussing the problem whether they cannot find a way to utilise the seemingly wasted sunlight. Nature has reservoiried them in the coal-fields—that is, God has reservoiried them—and out of its reservoir we gather the light. But now men are beginning to say, “Can we not reservoir this sunlight, this heat that goes to waste, and make it do the world’s work for us?” The world is full of God’s gifts. He only waits for us with pick and axe and hoe, with sweat of brain and sweat of body, to find a way to realise them. And as God sets us to work to get His gifts, and as God fills the world full with them, so God conceals Himself in the giving. I turn to my books of literature, and I find praises of Nature. Nature! What is Nature but a word for God? What is Nature but the minister and servant? What is Nature but the elements that are dropping the great sheaves of wheat in our path, and we do not know that Boaz is hiding behind the hedge smiling at our joy in our discovery. God conceals Himself. He ministers through others, and takes as to Himself the thanks we give to them. (*Lyman Abbott, D.D.*) *Combination of strength and gentleness in Boaz*:—There are persons to be met with in social life who, while possessing the more solid qualities of moral excellence, are singularly deficient in the more graceful. They have honesty, but they have no sensibility; they have truth, but they are strangely wanting in tenderness. You have the marble column, but you have not the polish or the delicate tracery on its surface; you have the rugged oak, but you miss the jasmine or the honeysuckle creeping gracefully around it from its roots. But the conduct of Boaz, as we stand and hear him giving those directions to his reapers, proves the compatibility of those two forms of excellence, and how the strong and the amiable may meet and harmonise in the same character. They do always meet in the highest forms of moral greatness. (*A. Thomson, D.D.*) *The refining art of doing good*:—I speak of the art of doing good because it deserves a place among the beautiful arts of earth and heaven. We speak “of the refinement of the arts.” Men may cultivate the beautiful and be no better at heart for it all. The beautiful has no ministry to those who reject the great Artist of the universe. He would have saved the world long ago by the ministry of the beautiful had it been possible. What pictures are like those He hangs before us every day? What sunsets represented on the canvas are like the real sunsets? When we love the great Artist out of whose mind has poured all the beauty there is in the world, then every leaf and every flower, every sunrise and every sunset, every vision of beauty in earth or sky or sea, has its tender, gentle, refining influence upon the adoring heart. This art of doing good refines the heart and life even more than the study of the beautiful. (*C. C. McCabe, D.D.*)

Ver. 17. *So she gleaned in the field until even.*—*Persevering labour*:—1. Gleaners in gospel-fields should continue in their gleanings from morning to evening. How many are but half Sabbath folk, that can spare to spend a morning in Sabbath service, but are for their pastimes after that! Ruth was none of those lazy gleaners. 2. Though God be very bountiful to us, yet will He have us to use all the means in a way of subserviency to His bounty. God will give us at the second-hand what He would not give us at first-hand; He will give us grace and knowledge by the use of the means, which He gives not immediately from Himself. “God sells all for labour,” saith Hesiod. (*C. Ness.*) *Labour*:—I. NO LABOUR IS TOO INSIGNIFICANT FOR LOVE. “So she gleaned.” She was of a good family, accustomed to a life of ease and plenty. That which she does now is anything but dignified. 1. A work for the commonest powers. 2. A work for the commonest people. 3. A work whose results bear no comparison to the expenditure of labour. 4. A work in which is redone that which has been considered as done. Men measure the worth of work by its conspicuousness. The real worth of work lies in meeting the necessity for its existence, and the motive which inspires it. Two lives depend upon her toil—then her work has worth; she loves the woman for whom she toils—then her work has dignity. Her love consecrates lowest means for highest ends. II. NO RESULTS OF LABOUR ARE TOO INSIGNIFICANT FOR CARE. She “beat out that she had gleaned.” (*S. B. Rees.*) *The successful gleaner*:—1. Ruth was a gleaner; and so should we be. The Bible is that field. Search the Scriptures; glean there. Pick up every grain, for it contains precious nourishment. No matter how many gleaners; there is food enough for all. 2. Alas, how many careless ones there are, who never glean at all! They loiter all the day of their life idle. And so, when night comes, they sink into eternity with nothing done. 3. Others, again, begin when Ruth leaves off, at even. All the bright and

sunny portion of their lives they give to the world. 4. Ruth began gleaning in the morning. She felt that every hour must be employed; that every moment was precious. She laboured diligently. May we make God's Word our daily study! (*Bp. Oxenden.*)

Ver. 18. She took it up, and went into the city.—*Careful of the fruit of labour*:—It is no less necessary to be careful of the fruit of our labours than to labour with diligence. "In all labour there is profit," says the wise man; yet there are some that labour for the wind. They lose what they have wrought because they suffer it, through their carelessness, to slip through their fingers. This folly, however, is much less frequent in things relating to the body than in those which relate to the soul. Yet some need admonition to manage their worldly affairs with discretion; but it is far more needful to be careful that we lose none of those things which we have wrought in the service of God, for the benefit of our souls, but that we receive a full reward. (*G. Lawson.*) *Carry home the wheat*:—You know it is one thing to have grace, and another thing to have common sense. But she had both. She had got more than she wanted, and "she beat out that she had gleaned; and it was about an ephah of barley." And she carried away—the straw? No, she did not; but that is what we do sometimes. We attend a meeting, and when we go away we leave the corn behind, and carry away the straw. (*H. Moorhouse.*)

Ver. 19. Where hast thou gleaned to-day?—*Where hast thou gleaned to-day?*—I. THE SPHERE: LIFE'S OPPORTUNITIES. 1. The law of labour is the law of life. In this world but little can be accomplished without energy and enterprise. In every department this is true. 2. To the open and eager eye openings invite and opportunities multiply. "Let me now go to the field." "I have set before thee an open door." "The field is the world." (*Isa. vi. 8.*) 3. Forms of activity, how diversified they are. There is not only the reaper but the "gleaner" also. "All works are good, and each is best when most it pleases Thee." "Gather up the fragments," and despise not "the day of small things." 4. Scope exists for all. "How many serve, how many more may to the service come." "Even I, in fields so broad, some duties may fulfil." 5. Each "day" brings its demands. "To-day." II. THE SERVICE: OUR USE OR NEGLECT OF LIFE'S OPPORTUNITIES. 1. Neglect possible. There is no compulsion. The parable of the talents. The field of the slothful (*Prov. xxiv.*) 2. Success attainable. Satisfaction in healthful industry. Beneficent results are an "ephah of barley." "Neither man nor work unblest wilt Thou permit to be." "He shall doubtless come again bringing his sheaves with him." "Enter into the joy of thy Lord." 3. Co-operation here desirable. "Let fall some for her." "Reproach her not." Community in labour. Unselfishly thinking of others and their work, without unkindness or rebuke. "Each worker pleases where the rest he serves in charity." III. THE SCRUTINY: DIRECT INVESTIGATION INTO OUR USE OF LIFE'S OPPORTUNITIES. 1. The "day," however, varying in incident and duration, soon "goeth away." "The shadows of the evening are stretched out." "The night cometh when no man can work." 2. After that, the tribunal and award. (a) The fact of judgment (*Matt. xxv. 19.*) (b) Its characteristics. (1) Personal and individual: "Those." (2) Practical: "Where." (3) Precise: Each "day" and its doings. How wise to let the inquiry here anticipate the inquiry hereafter. Day by day and every day should conscience put the question, "Where hast thou gleaned to-day?" (*J. P. Allen, M.A.*) *A good day's gleanings*:—Let Naomi ask us this question, and let us answer, as far as we can, out of Ruth's experience. "Where hast thou gleaned?" 1. The first thing I am impressed with is this—if you will allow Ruth to answer the question for us—no matter how dark may have been your past life, no matter through what changes and hardships you may have come, you are not justified in giving in to melancholy, much less to despair. Do not sit still; go on with your round. Cast about, go out and forage somewhere. Do the thing that lies next to your hand; go back to the ordinary common work-a-day world, and you will find relief. "Where hast thou gleaned to-day?" 2. If, in answer to my question, you would say that you are nobody, that you are of no account, and that all life's plans and purposes have come to one swift catastrophe, I rebuke you from Ruth's history. You may be poor and obscure; so was Ruth; but a new day had dawned. Keep up your heart; greater, if you only thought it, are the things behind the scenes in your favour than all that seems to be against you. 3. Then, when we stand here and ask, and answer, the questions that flew swift as a weaver's shuttle between Ruth and Naomi—does not

this come out? You have not been working in vain, if you will tell the truth. If you look at things aright, and take yet another look, especially those who are down-cast, tell me if you are not bound to admit that your history is beginning to show glints of sunshine, here and there, through its darkness and chaos. Somehow you are getting conscious of it that there is an upper light breaking in. Now, think of the man who came into the field, whose presence opened up a new chapter for Ruth, and opened a wonderful chapter in God's purposes for a great while to come. On what small hinges do great doors hang! The world is still God's acre. It is not a field of riot, of chance and haphazard. It is not true that this is a world in which only the fittest survive and the weakest go to the wall. It is not true that the race is to the swift and the battle to the strong. Don't you see how the gospel comes on the scene with the face of that man Boaz? He is always going about the field, this Boaz, this Kinsman, this Redeemer. His eyes are on you, and He knows more about you than you are giving Him credit for. Blessed is He who is taking knowledge of thee. "Where hast thou gleaned to-day? and where wroughtest thou?"

4. Again, looking at this as a fireside gathering, as it were, to-day, at the end of one week, and before the new one, with its activities, is fully upon us, does not this come out of the question and the answer—that, after all, you have had unexpected success? Ruth's story shows us that, when we come across good times, when we come to what is called "good luck," we are in danger then. Now, don't go away and say that that is come to you because you rose early and sat up late, because you were sharper than other people, because your wits are keener, because you have shuffled the per cents., so to speak, more cleverly. Put in God somewhere; give God the credit, give Him the praise, give Him the glory, for, I tell you, it is all His. (J. McNeill.)

Gleaning.—There are some whose only chance of obtaining knowledge is by gleaning. Their education has been neglected. Their opportunities of attending a place of worship are few. Their time for reading is limited. In a word, they are not farmers, and can never show a stack: they can only gather by gleaning. I. To such let me say, "GLEAN WHERE THE CORN GROWS AND LIES NEAR AT HAND. You will not find the corn by the wayside, or on the moor. You must go to the fields: it is only on the cultivated land you can find it." And so with the knowledge that is worth possessing. It is not to be found everywhere. For instance, it is not from every pulpit you hear the gospel: why go where Christ is not preached? It is not in all company that you may glean wisdom. "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise." It would be well for us to bear in mind that we cannot be friendly with the ungodly without storing up some of the talk we hear, and that we thus store sorrow for the future. It is not every book from which we can glean corn. Reading a bad book is to gather poison. II. To glean successfully we must be willing to stoop. Gleaning is stooping. The writer heard a man behind a counter say, "The worst folks to deal with are those who know all you are going to say." This is true enough. A schoolboy who thinks he knows it all is the most hopeless of pupils. The apprentice who will not be told never learns his trade. Many a man would have risen if he could have afforded to stoop for awhile. III. If we would glean a heap, we must be content with a little at a time. The woman who has gathered the largest bundle of corn never once picked up a handful. It was mostly in single ears: "Here a little, and there a little." It is wonderful what may be done by never passing by a thing that is worth preserving. To note down, every day, each remarkable thing, would make a wonderful volume in time. To do this thoroughly, we must know the value of each grain of truth. Don't let the thought that it is only a little prevent your stooping, for stacks are made up of single straws, and London is made up of single houses, which were built a brick at a time. IV. No one can glean well who is not able to persevere. Gleaning is tiring work. It means a back-ache. We must, if we mean to succeed, be willing to go on long after we are weary. We cannot expect to have it all our own way. If we were as willing to spur ourselves to perseverance as we are to urge on our weary horses, we should accomplish much more than we do. Abraham Lincoln was asked if he thought the war would be over while he was President. "Can't say, sir." "But, Mr. Lincoln, what do you mean to do?" "Peg away, sir—keep pegging away." And pegging away liberated millions of bondmen, and wiped the foul stain of slavery from America's 'scutcheon. (T. Champness.) *A charity sermon*.—Consider the diffusion of pleasure and delight which arose from no great nor lasting act of charity. The hearts of Naomi and Ruth did sing for joy upon sight of a relief which would soon want another: and Boaz throbbed with more noble ecstasies, by as much as it is more blessed to give than to receive. I. THAT THE POOR HAVE A

RIGHT TO GLEAN UPON US, and that part of our substance, by the laws of God and nature, is their strict and proper due. II. THAT THE BLESSING OF GOD AND THE POOR IS AN AMPLE RETRIBUTION TO THE RICH FOR SUFFERING THEM TO GLEAN, and that they have as strict a right to that as the poor have to their gleaning, and much greater refreshments springing from it. III. THAT IN RELIGIOUS PUBLIC MINISTRATIONS IT IS FAR FROM VAINGLORY TO DISTINGUISH OURSELVES BY OUR LIBERALITY. Then the more we give the more we may be truly said to promote the glory of God! Then the more we show the forwardness of our mind the more we profess subjection to the laws of Christ. (*R. Coleire, M.A.*) *Gleaners in God's harvest field*.—What have we gleaned? What improvements in thought, character, or heart treasure to refresh us in the present and bring a glorious reward in the future? The world is God's harvest field, and we are all gleaners. Some gather great swaths and bind heavy bundles, and some gather only a little bunch of grain here and there. The most poor and obscure may glean, and the richest and most prosperous can do but little more than glean. Each day God throws down great handfuls from Time's garner. Let us take one day. Man rises from slumber in health and strength. He goes forth; nature welcomes him, the heavens are kindling with the dawn, the earth is teeming with beauty. He enters the bosom of his family; from loving voices, smiles and all, he gleaneth. The child and mother, from a narrow yet fruitful field, are daily learning lessons that shall last through all their future life. Nothing is trivial. God seems to say to us, "Attend to the commonplace, not the heroic." It is grains that fill up our days and aggregate the substance of our lives. Where have I been to-day? What company have I met? What have been my enjoyments? Whither have my affections turned? Some gather mean and base things on the highway of life, while others gather all that is beautiful. In the same pond the white and the yellow lily grow. The one from the surrounding elements draws whiteness, purity, and fragrance; and the other only yellow hues and no fragrance. What have we gleaned from this world for the world to come from men, from books, from our families, from work, from nature, and from God? If we would have our soul's hunger satisfied and our spiritual life nurtured into vigour and beauty, God's fields are open before us and we must glean. (*J. Spencer Kennard.*) *Confidence between kindred*.—It should be one of the first principles in the government of a family that the young shall be taught to tell their parents of all their movements, and that they shall in this way have another powerful motive always to act in such a manner as that they shall never have anything to conceal. It is one of the worst signs in the formation of character when a son has haunts which he is afraid to name, companions with whom he dreads to be seen, or books which he can only read by stealth. Such suspicious secrecy is always the sure and distinct indication of a progress downwards. When the ingenuous son is ready to make his father the trusted confidant of all his pursuits and plans, of all his companionships and amusements, there cannot have been any great divergence as yet from the paths of virtue. But when the parent must needs be duped and hoodwinked, and is thought of and treated as an inconvenient spy, the child has lost the first element of filial obedience by the loss of filial trust and love, and rather wants opportunity than inclination to come out as a villain or a profligate. (*A. Thomson, D.D.*)

Ver. 20. **Blessed be he of the Lord, who hath not left off His kindness.**—*God's blessing*.—1. In its nature it is "kindness"—the very soul of tenderness to the God-fearing among men. 2. In its continuance. He cannot "leave off" making His children happy. 3. In its application to both worlds—to the "living," as the song of a Ruth may testify; to the "dead," as the hope of a Naomi must imply. Both are in the covenant of the God of Israel. 4. In its expression. He knows how to prepare some lip to give it adequate expression before the world. The old shall ever confirm the faith of the young. (*E. Price.*) *Kindness to the dead*.—The natural human protectors are gone, but the Almighty Father has taken their place. It is what Elimelech and Mahlon would have desired, and it is kindness to them. Can we not imagine that those who have passed from earth, leaving poor, disconsolate ones behind to struggle with life's difficulties, often find, in their glorified condition, ever fresh and continuous reasons for rejoicing, because they see how the ever-watchful love of God is constantly shown towards beloved ones whose comfort was their desire and endeavour? Mothers and fathers have died wondering what their children's future would be in this rude, rough world, and with their wonder fear has mingled. Yet now from heaven's clear heights they

behold God's tender care surrounding them by day and night, saving them from danger, raising up noble-souled friends to help them, doing more on their behalf than their imagination or faith conceived possible; and as they see all this, their souls are moved with a passion of rapturous gratitude, and heaven rings melodious with their "new song" of praise. Yes, the dead are wiser than we think, and probably see more than we suppose of the lives from which they are parted only by a thin, and perhaps from their side transparent, veil. This, at least, is certain, that when God inspires the benevolent to shield the orphan and help the widow, He shows that He has "not left off His kindness to the living and the dead." (*Wm. Braden.*)

The man is near of kin unto us, one of our next kinsmen.—*Christ typified by the goel under the law*:—You can hardly need to be told how a connection, the very closest, may be traced between the Jewish and the Christian dispensations. The redeemer under the law is most accurately a type of the Redeemer under the gospel. Now, suppose we take in succession three cases in which the goel or redeemer was bidden to interfere—**forfeiture of inheritance, loss of liberty, and shedding of blood**; and examining each transaction under its legal description, let us strive to show you the fidelity with which it images the redemption wrought out for us by Christ. I. We begin with **THE FORFEITURE OF INHERITANCE**. In Lev. xxv. directions are given for the interference of the goel, or redeemer. We fasten, first of all, on the fact that none but a kinsman could fill the office of goel or redeemer. Who does not see, that in laying down and adhering to such a principle as this, the law taught mankind impressively the lesson that He who should arise the Redeemer of the lost world must be bone of their bone and flesh of their flesh? "Forasmuch," says the apostle, "as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same." And shall we ever hesitate to declare that the comforting thing to the followers of Christ is that the Goel, the Redeemer, is in the strictest sense their kinsman? Christ was like myself in all points, my sinfulness only excepted. Who is the Israelite that has grown poor, and alienated from him the possession of his father, if it be not man, originally the chosen of God, rich in a birthright which gave him a glorious world for his dwelling-place, yes, and immortality for his lifetime, but who afterwards, by yielding to temptation, stripped himself of all his wealth, and made himself the heir to nothing but corruption? And when we have pointed out to you the impoverished Jew, spoiled of the possession of his fathers, unable of himself to do anything towards regaining the inheritance, and then have turned your attention on the kinsman redeemer paying down the ransom, bringing back the land into the family, keeping it in his own hands until the jubilee trumpet sounded, and then restoring it to the original owner—we think we have furnished you with so vivid a sketch of paradise lost through human apostasy and regained by the purchase of the Mediator, and given back on the day that the archangel shall lift his trumpet, and shall blow a blast at which the sheeted dead shall start, that it must on all hands be confessed that the goel of the law was pre-eminently a type of the Redeemer of the gospel. II. A brief notice will suffice for the second—**WHERE THERE HAS BEEN LOSS OF LIBERTY**. You will find, by referring to Lev. xxv., from which we have already quoted, that for the discharge of debt, or the procuring of subsistence, an Israelite might sell himself either to an Israelite or to a stranger. If he became the servant of an Israelite, there appears to have been no right of redemption—he must remain in his power till the year of jubilee. But if he became the servant of a stranger, then there was a case for the interposition of the goel in the law; for even after that he is sold he may be redeemed again—one of his brethren may redeem him. If the master were an Israelite, the servant was in no sense alienated from God's people, and the exigence was not such as to warrant the goel's interference; but if the master were a stranger, then the servitude became typical of man's bondage to Satan. It might have been said, in a degree, to have withdrawn the servant from the congregation of Israel; and thus a case made out for the kinsman redeemer. The goel might come forward, and the servant might be freed. You will perceive at once that, in its typical character, this transaction is identical with that already reviewed. Is it not the Scriptural representation of man by nature that he is the servant of sin, led captive by Satan at his will? The Israelite could have sold himself to a stranger; and not one farthing could he advance towards bringing back his freedom. Must he languish, then, for ever in bondage? Must he groan for ever beneath the load of oppression? There advances a Mighty One, who proclaims Himself his Kinsman, a Goel made of a woman, made under the law,

and bearing the likeness of sinful flesh ; and He pays down in sufferings the price of redemption. He strikes the chain with His Cross, and it is broken into shivers ; Ho bids the prisoner come forth, and he walks in " the glorious liberty of the children of God." III. We proceed to the third case of the goel's interference, a case which differs considerably from those already examined. It was the office of the kinsman, the goel, to interfere, not only when there had been forfeiture of inheritance, or loss of liberty, BUT ALSO WHEN THERE HAD BEEN SHEDDING OF BLOOD. If murder had been perpetrated, the prosecution and the execution of the murderer devolved on the nearest of kin to the murdered party. He must pursue the murderer ; and if he overtook him before he reached the city of refuge he might take summary vengeance for the death of his relative. But if the goel were not at hand at the time when the crime was committed, it would seem that no stranger had right to arrest or follow the criminal. He betook himself unmolested to the nearest city of refuge, and remained there in safety until the cause was tried before the judges of the land. So that in this case, as well as in the others, the interference depended on the kinsmanship ; nothing else could warrant a man in undertaking the office of the goel. And thus that distinguishing feature of a goel, which made him throughout the type of Christ—the feature of kinsmanship to the party requiring interference—stands out as prominently when blood was to be avenged as when land was to be redeemed or liberty regained. But wherein, you will say, in this instance, lies the typical resemblance between the offices of the goel and the offices of Christ ? Created deathless and imperishable, was not the human race slain by Satan when he wrought up our first parents to an act prohibited by the words, " In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die " ? We suppose it to have been with reference to this slaughter of mankind that Christ said of the devil, " He was a murderer from the beginning." It was clearly through the instrumentality of Satan that death, whether of body or of soul, gained footing in this creation ; but if done through his instrumentality it may justly be ascribed to his authorship ; and we account it most correct, therefore, to describe Satan as the great " man-slayer." He it is that hath shed human blood ; and all that vast mowing down of successive generations, which keeps the sepulchres replenished with fresh harvests of death, must be referred to that awful being who was " a murderer from the beginning." And if we can thus find " the man-slayer " in Satan, cannot we find " the avenger of blood " in Christ ? Who pursued the murderer ? Who, century after century, unwearied and undiverted, opposed Himself in every quarter, by every weapon, to the shedder of blood, till at last, meeting him front to front, in one dread struggle, He took on him a vengeance that drew the wonder of the intelligent universe, and " through death destroyed him that had the power of death " ? Who was it that, sorrowing over the wretchedness of a stricken race, " put on righteousness as a breastplate, and clothed Himself with zeal as with a cloak," and then, equipped for the conflict, sprang forth to grapple with the assassin ? Who but the Goel ? who but the Kinsman Redeemer ? (*H. Melvill, B.D.*)

Ver. 22. *It is good, my daughter, that thou go out with his maidens.—Instruction from elders :—*Old persons may be expected to have collected, by reflection and experience, more wisdom than the young, and should be ready to communicate instruction to those that need it. Let the young have their hands prepared for the service of the old, and the old may recompense them abundantly by the words of their mouths. Happy would it have been for Rehoboam and for all his people had he known what respect is due to the wise counsels of the aged. What numbers of young persons take rash steps in the journey of life which cannot be retraced, because they rather choose to follow the impulse of their own passions than to ask and follow the advices of those who brought them into the world. (*G. Lawson.*) *The acceptance of favours :—*" It is good that thou go forth with his maidens," since he invites thee to glean in his fields. Although Naomi would not be troublesome to her relations, nor solicit favours from them when necessity did not compel her, she was not so high-minded as to reject a favour that was offered. Poor persons, who have seen better days, are sometimes too nice and scrupulous in receiving obligations. It is good to be as independent in the world as our circumstances will allow ; but to be absolutely independent is impossible, and to have a spirit above the acceptance of favours, when our circumstances render the acceptance of them needful, is a proud resistance of our spirits to that Providence which manages our concerns and which manages them with wisdom and kindness when

it lays our pride in the dust. (*Ibid.*) **That they meet thee not in any other field.**—*Gadding to be discouraged*:—"Maidens," says one shrewd old commentator, "are the fittest company for maidens, among whom a chaste widow, such as Ruth was, may well be recounted." Modesty is the life-guard of chastity. Let this suggest the wider rule that every one should have his chosen field in which to gather Christian instruction and wisdom; and that having chosen it, he ought to keep to it. The common shepherd whom you meet on the mountains will tell you that the wandering sheep never thrives. And further, that we ought to choose for our cherished companions and "inner friends" those who are gleaners in the gospel-field like ourselves. Wander, through want of vigilance or through secret preference, into the society of the idle, the ungodly, or the immoral, and you are on the enemy's ground and in the midst of serpents and snares. You are out of the sphere of Divine protection whenever you walk into the circle of temptation without a call of duty; and there is no Davy-lamp in those noxious mines to prevent explosion, or to protect you from destruction. But the fellowship of them that fear God will show you how to be good, and will make you better. Even the lump of clay, when it was placed near the rose, according to the beautiful Persian proverb, caught some of its fragrance (Cant. i. 8). (*A. Thomson, D.D.*)

CHAPTER III.

VER. 1. Shall I not seek rest for thee?—Rest for Ruth:—I. THE OBJECT OF NAOMI'S SOLICITUDE. Poor Ruth: a destitute, forlorn, bereaved, homeless, portionless widow. Think of the destitute circumstances of a bereaved sinner, when awakened to find out how deplorably he is ruined and utterly undone under the fall. She was between the two countries. Just the position of a soul awakened. Yet further, see the character of Ruth portraying thy condition yet more strongly. You remark, that she had escaped from Moab and refused to go back again. There was a decision of character, there was a distinction, there was the plain mark of belonging to God. Do mark, I beseech you, here, the importance of steadfast perseverance in the Christian character. II. THE NATURE OF NAOMI'S SOLICITUDE. It was rest she wanted for her daughter-in-law: "Shall I not seek rest for thee?" I wish to give some description of this rest. 1. And the first idea is tranquillity; a sacred calm, a blessed believing satisfaction. For when the poor soul is first awakened by the Spirit of God there is anything but tranquillity; it is tossed to and fro in a state of uncertainty, a state of perplexity, a state of wretchedness. "Shall I not seek rest for thee?" Shall I not tell thee where it is to be had? Shall I not point out the fact that it is to be found only in Ruth's determination—"Thy God shall be my God," a covenant God—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost? Get to know Him, get to serve Him with decision, and thou shalt have tranquillity. 2. But I pass on to mark, in addition to the tranquillity sought, it was desired that she should have an inheritance, and an inheritance of great value too. Now what says the apostle to this? "Blessed be God," we have got an inheritance. III. THE END OF THIS SOLICITUDE. And a very blessed one it was. (*J. Irons.*)

Ver. 3. Wash thyself, therefore, and anoint thee, and put thy raiment upon thee.—*Washed, anointed, and clothed*:—Need we explain this washing, anointing, and clothing? Need we point to the only fountain for sin? Need we say that the holy anointing oil, which consecrates the believer in Jesus a priest and king unto God, is His own blessed Spirit? Must we define the raiment to be that robe of Divine and human righteousness combined wherewith each soul is invested which rejects its own filthy rags? (*C. F. Hall.*)

Ver. 4. Uncover his feet, and lay thee down.—*Doubtful expedients*:—I. WE BEGIN WITH SOME EXPLANATORY OBSERVATIONS, FOR THE PURPOSE OF VINDICATING THE NARRATIVE FROM MISAPPREHENSION AND ABUSE. 1. We must notice the general contrariety of pastoral customs to our own which marked those ancient times in the East. What unadorned simplicity! Wearing the garments which had been worn by him during the day, he throws himself down to rest at the end of the heaps of winnowed corn, with nothing but a simple mat beneath him, and a similar

covering or cloak above him. How different is all this from the dignity and reserve which would be maintained and the many artificial luxuries and comforts that would be possessed by a person of similar rank and wealth among ourselves. 2. It is a fact that, both in those times and up to this hour in the East, servants have been accustomed to lay themselves in this manner at the feet of their master. One modern traveller mentions that his Arab servants were quite in the practice of doing so with him; and, in cold evenings, of claiming the privilege, which had descended from immemorial usage, of drawing over themselves the skirts of the long mat or cloak in which his person was enveloped. 3. Moreover, it is an interesting fact bearing on the present subject, that a very prominent part of the marriage ceremony among the Orientals was for the bridegroom to throw the skirt of his robe over his bride. The act of Ruth here described was, therefore, a significant action, in which she claimed the protection of Boaz and the honourable acknowledgment of her as his wife. 4. It is further to be observed that while the whole scene proves Boaz to have been a man most pure in spirit and of sensitive virtue, the conduct of Ruth does not for one moment make him doubt or question her purity. But here our defence ceases, at least in respect to Naomi. While we vindicate her intentions, we are constrained to censure her measures; while we acquit her of designing evil, we must blame her for not "abstaining from all appearance of evil." There was too much of cunning and stratagem about the manner of the whole transaction. There was a forcing of Providence where there should have been a trustful waiting on it; a cutting of a short way to a desired issue, instead of moving in the way which God might open to her. II. THUS EXPLAINED, THE TRANSACTION SUGGESTS SOME IMPORTANT PRACTICAL LESSONS. 1. The duty of caring for our good name. "Two things there are," saith St. Augustine, "whereof every man should be specially chary and tender—his conscience and his credit." 2. The duty of charity in our judgment of others. It will often be found to be the wisest course to form our estimate of a doubtful action by the character of the actor, and when we stand in doubt, to let love turn the scale. Persons seem to each man what he is to himself. One who suspects hypocrisy in the world is rarely transparent; the man constantly on the watch for cheating is generally dishonest; he who suspects impurity is prurient. 3. It is a first principle in Christian morals that duty must always have the preference before inclination. What true Christian chivalry, born of faith, there was in the heart of this Bethlehem yeoman! He was not only sternly honest, but sensitively honourable, bearing his escutcheon without a sinister brand on it. 4. It is surely not unnatural to ascend in thought from Boaz to Him who, in an infinitely higher sense, is our Kinsman Redeemer, who became "bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh," and died as the propitiatory victim for our offences, in order that He might reinstate us in the Divine favour, and redeem for us the heavenly inheritance which we had lost. (A. Thomson, D.D.)

Vers. 10, 11. **Blessed be thou of the Lord, my daughter. . . . I will do to thee all that thou requirest.**—*The first-fruits of grace*.—The passage before us gives a copious illustration of the first-fruits of grace to the accepted soul. Jesus welcomes, blesses, and abundantly rewards all who thus come unto Him. First we have Divine approval. Boaz does not reject or repel the lowly suitor at his feet. The difference in their outward conditions was great. Yet he neither chides her boldness, nor reproaches her with sorrow, nor refuses her plea. He listens to her prayer in kindness. He invokes the Divine blessing upon her in her need. And how his whole address to her illustrates the Saviour's gracious approval of those who seek Him! When the wearied soul comes to the feet of Jesus this is ever the welcome of approbation which it receives. The Saviour takes immediate notice of the prayer which rises up before Him, and answers it with the kindest encouragement. Boaz next illustrates for us the Divine promises. He meets the full requisition of his suppliant. There is not a want which the Christian feels for which there is not a provision promised in the Word of God. And when we come to ask His mercy, and lay ourselves at His feet in humble dedication to Him, the Saviour takes all our concerns into His own hands, and Himself promises to provide for every need. Another of the first-fruits of grace which we find in this illustration is the bounty of Divine gifts. Boaz not only promises for the future, but he bestows in the present. He will not send Ruth away empty. He fills her vail with as much barley as she could carry to her mother. An abundant supply for the wants of both. He is as generous in the amount of his liberality as he

is delicate and free in the manner of its bestowal. Thus the Saviour richly and freely bestows His gifts of grace upon those who love Him. What sweet peace He pours into the conscience in the assurance of our forgiveness! What clear light He gives to the understanding of His whole method of salvation and scheme of truth! What solidity He bestows upon the judgment in its satisfaction with His plans revealed! What joy He awakens in the heart, in the hope and anticipation of His final glory! How He makes our whole path a path of increasing light and abounding peace! In Him we are never straitened. The more diligently and truly we wait upon Him, the more abundantly will our strength be renewed. He will freely say to us, like Boaz to Ruth, "Bring the vail that thou hast upon thee, and hold it." Whatever we are ready to receive He is waiting to bestow. But the illustration from the vail of Ruth fails, in the important fact that its measure was fixed, but our capacity to hold increases with our receipts of the Divine bounty. And who shall tell where God's gracious willingness to bestow shall find its limit? As faith enlarges, and we learn to expect large things, and to attempt large things, so also becomes enlarged the measure of grace which faith receives. The history before us illustrates the Divine fidelity. With what confidence Naomi trusts in the truth and faithfulness of Boaz! The result proved that her confidence was not misplaced. He did complete with entire success the work of protection and mercy which he had undertaken. It is upon such entire fidelity in our gracious Kinsman that we are required to place our trust. "Great is His faithfulness." "His name is called faithful and true." (*S. H. Tyng, D.D.*) **Thou art a virtuous woman.**—*Ruth the virtuous*:—1. Observe, to begin with one of her humblest virtues, Ruth's industry. She accompanies Naomi to the land of Israel; but not to live on public charity or become the humble pensioner of affluent relatives. Reared in the lap of luxury, she has never learned to work; yet in a noble spirit of independence she resolves to earn her bread with her own hands. We have called this a humble virtue, not because we hold it cheap, or do not regret that under the debasing influence of our poor-laws and the self-indulgent spirit of the age, it is dying out of the land. One of the saddest phases of the times is that, for themselves or their parents, thousands now accept and even clamour for public charity who, less than a century ago, would have scorned to touch it. We call it a humble virtue, because, notwithstanding the degeneracy of the age, it still dwells in many a lowly home, stamping those with a true nobility who feel the bread taste sweet their own hands have earned, and, looking forward with a Christian's hope to the rest of heaven, are content here to live to work and work to live. 2. Observe next her humility. On losing their fortune some retain in a silly pride what but aggravates the loss, rankling like a thorn in a bleeding wound. An empty sack cannot stand erect; yet they inflict misery on themselves, and not seldom wrong on others, by the mean and even dishonest things they do to keep up appearances. Deeming some honest but humble work beneath their dignity, they buy what they cannot pay for, or borrow what they cannot return. Ashamed to work, they are not ashamed to live on the fruits of others' industry rather than their own. There is something inexpressibly mean in this; and worse than mean. It argues a spirit of rebellion against Him and His providence who setteth up one and putteth down another. How different from this un-Christian and rebellious spirit the humility of Ruth! How beautiful it is! Willing to engage in any honest work, however humble, she bends like a reed to the blast, bows her gentle head meekly before the majesty of heaven, and, meeting her trials like a Christian heroine, drinks off the cup mingled and presented by her Father's hand. 3. Observe her affection to Naomi. It wrings Ruth's heart to part with sister, mother, and country; but it would break it to part with Naomi. She cannot do it. The ship may sink; but, nailing her colours to the mast, she will sink or swim with it. Death only shall part them: nor death—the last favour her lips shall ask, that they lay her in Naomi's grave. Nobly did Ruth redeem the pledges of this affecting scene. She teaches us, by what she was to Naomi, what we are to be to Christ; how we should cleave to Him—how we should love Him—with what devotion of heart and body, of soul, strength, mind and spirit we should serve Him, and gladly spend and be spent for Him—saying, as we take up our cross to follow the lover and Redeemer of our souls, "Where Thou goest," &c. (*T. Guthrie, D.D.*)

Vers. 15-17. **Six measures of barley.**—*Exact reckonings of mercies*:—1. True virtue or grace makes persons universally good. Boaz was a gracious or virtuous man. He is good in his charity as well as in his chastity: he adds one grace to

another (2 Pet. i. 5). 2. God's blessings bestowed on us should be received by us in an exact reckoning: we should receive them by number, weight and measure; and to behold the quantity of them is an excellent way to get a thankful heart (Psa. cxvi. 12). 3. As charity is no churl, so neither must it be blind or extravagant. His liberality is not lavish in laying out God's blessings, but he giveth in judgment with discretion, not without consideration. Prudence is the general guide and universal mistress in all acts and exercises of virtue (Psa. cxli. 5). 4. As Boaz, so much more our God never sends home true suitors empty. He giveth, and He giveth liberally—He giveth grace, He giveth more grace (Jas. iv. 6). Every Sabbath, and sermon or sacrament, Christ cries to us, as Boaz to Ruth, "Bring hither thy vail, that I may fill it." Faith is the receiving grace. God proportions His performing to our believing: as thou believest so be it unto thee (Matt. viii. 13). (C. Ness.)

Ver. 18. *Sit still, my daughter.*—*Waiting upon Providence*:—1. When lawful means are rightly used, then should we wait upon God for the end. The care of the means belongs to us, but the care of the end belongs to God. We must commit ourselves in all well-doing to the Lord (Psa. xxxvii. 5; 1 Pet. iv. 19). "Until thou know how the matter shall fall." 2. All matters concerning mankind are appointed by a Divine decree in heaven, before they be accomplished by a Divine Providence upon earth. Even all matches and marriages are made in heaven, before ever they come to be solemnised on earth (Psa. lv. 22). It is our work to cast care, and it is God's work to take care (1 Pet. v. 7). We must let God alone with His own work, which is then only well done, when it is done by Himself. The man will not be at rest. 3. Conscientious persons should be restless until they make good payment of their promises. Alas, how few Boaz's are in the world, who pay what they promise! (*Ibid.*) *Avoid over-haste in the plans of life*:—I want to give you old Naomi's advice. Listen, let older heads speak to you, even let God, speak to you: "He who was, and is, and is to come," the Almighty God, speak a word like this: "Do not get fretful; do not get desponding; do not get over-eager; do not lag behind, but do not run too far forward; take care of taking things too much into your own hands." You are only in the middle of things. Life is a plan; there is a purpose giving shape, aye, and blessedness to it all. Have you seen and understood? There is a clue to the maze, and that is the Man on the field, to whom all belongs, the mighty man of wealth. Do you know Him, and is His arm working for you? Well, don't rush now; just go on steadily; sit still, my daughter. Sit still, my heart, wait on thy God, leave God to order all thy ways, and trust in Him whate'er betide. Be sure of it that He who has begun, in the way of infinite wisdom, has not done yet. Your days are only in the beginning, you are not at the end—wait on God. "Be of good courage, He shall strengthen your heart—wait, I say, on the Lord." "He who has begun a good work will carry it on until the day of Jesus Christ." Look back and see what He has done already; strengthen, and calm, and steady your hot and feverish soul; and let me say this for your encouragement, what Naomi said to Ruth: "Ah," she as good as said, "I know this man." Are you a little eager? Does your soul, sometimes in spite of yourself, haste forward to the consummation? Much more does His. He has set His mighty heart upon you; He loves you with an everlasting love; He is weary to get you, and He is shaping and controlling all things in heaven and earth for just one thing—to finish His redeeming work, and to get you home with rejoicing to be with Himself for ever and ever. (J. McNeill.) *The man will not be in rest.*—

Duty done at the right time:—I. IF THIS IS TO BE OUR CHARACTERISTIC AND HABIT, THERE ARE CERTAIN RULES THE OBSERVANCE OF WHICH IS INDISPENSABLE. We must not undertake more work, or ambitiously grasp at more engagements, than there is a fair and reasonable likelihood of our being able to accomplish. We must endeavour, by plan and forethought, so to dispose of our time as to make the most of every hour that is given us to work in. Then there must be no indolent procrastination, or giving way before little difficulties, or sitting down or turning aside because we think we see lions in the way; but rather the putting forth of vigorous effort in order to realise our plans and to keep ourselves master of our circumstances, instead of allowing our circumstances to master us. The benefits which grow out of this ordering of our time, and doing the work of each day in the day, are various and great. It helps to secure that whatever we undertake to do shall be well done, by our having abundance of time in which to do it. It

saves our consciences from the reproach and our characters from the shame of promise-breaking; for when the work of to-day is thrown over upon to-morrow, it is likely that much will fail to be done at all, according to the old Spanish proverb that "the street of By-and-By leads to the house of Never." It preserves us from that fretting of the temper which is the certain effect of hurry, and enables us to maintain more tranquillity of mind, and self-control, and self-respect. II. NEXT LET US APPLY THE PRINCIPLE IN THESE WORDS TO SOME THINGS IN DETAIL. There is especially one direction in which it is pre-eminently applicable. Suppose a man to have the consciousness awakened in him that he has never given earnest attention to the matter of his personal salvation; that he is under the displeasure of God, with a life of unforgiven sins accusing him; and that the near and solemn eternity is all unprovided for. This ought surely to become his immediate and paramount concern. "The man should not be in rest until he hath finished the thing this day." Who would sing songs to a man that was sinking and perishing in the fearful pit and the miry clay? Get him out of the pit first. He would be a fool who should propose to paint his ship while it was toiling and straining in the storm. Bring it first into calm waters and the safe harbour. But let us assume that the supreme interest has been cared for; and there are two observations which it is natural to connect with these suggestive words of Naomi. 1. There are certain duties which regularly fall to be performed by us, and which may be described as the work of every day. There are, for example, the duties of our stated secular vocation, whether they consist in headwork or in handiwork, or in both combined. In these we are daily summoned anew to serve God; and very much of the Christian's everyday religion consists in his discharging these common services in a Christian spirit. And daily mingling with these, and shedding down hallowed influences upon them, there are the more direct exercises of religion, especially those of secret devotion, on the morning and evening of every day. And scarcely less congenial with the tastes of his new nature will be his daily perusal of some chosen portion of Holy Scripture. And must we not further claim from the Christian heads of families that domestic devotion shall form an essential part of each day's round of service, in which every day's wants shall be turned to prayer, and every day's mercies to praise; in which family affection shall be nurtured and sanctified; in which the parents shall become more venerable and the children more endeared, and home become as one of the gates of heaven? 2. There is another large class of duties of a more special kind, which are not of daily recurrence, but are rather appropriate to particular times and circumstances, and may be said to grow out of them. (1) Observation of the weekly day of rest. (2) Making your will. (3) Making up quarrels. (4) Speaking words in season. Do not withhold yourself from doing good because your sphere of beneficent action is narrow. If you cannot do a prophet's work, yet give a cup of cold water to one of Christ's little ones. If you have not the means of founding or endowing a hospital, you can take a flower, perchance, and give it to some sister or brother who is pining in one of its wards, and you can give kind words and sunny looks along with it. The world around is full of opportunities of usefulness, if we would but seize them. We can scarcely stretch forth our hand without touching some form of human misery which we could mitigate or relieve. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it." (*A. Thomson, D.D.*)

CHAPTER IV.

VERS. 1-5. **Then went Boaz up to the gate.**—*Friends in council*:—I. THIS IS HOW BUSINESS SHOULD BE ATTENDED TO. 1. Speedily. 2. Expeditionously. 3. Righteously. II. THIS IS HOW DIFFICULT AFFAIRS SHOULD BE SETTLED, DELICATE CLAIMS ADJUSTED, FAIR RIGHTS ALLOWED AND SATISFIED. 1. Openly and publicly. 2. By the advice of wise men. 3. Calmly and deliberately. 4. With care and exactitude. III. THIS IS THE WAY THE AFFAIRS OF THE DESTITUTE AND NEEDY ESPECIALLY SHOULD BE ATTENDED TO. (*W. Bazendale.*) *Judicious methods of attaining our ends*:—1. The most probable means ought judiciously to be used in order to the accomplishing of our proposed ends. Thus Boaz, being restless for obtaining his promised end (chap. iii. 18), uses the likeliest means to obtain his end. Many a man loses a good end for want of right means tending to the end. 2. A marvellous providence doth attend God's servants

that do wait upon God in the way of obedience. The guiding hand of God doth make many a happy hit in the occurrences of His people. Thus the comely contexture of various providences are very marvellous to those that make observation of them. (*C. Ness.*) *Redemption proposed* :—How completely this proposal illustrates the proposition of our great Redeemer in our behalf. Thus publicly He agreed, in the presence of the angels of God, to make Himself an offering for sin. Thus legally would He fulfil all righteousness for man, and be made under the law, that He might redeem those who were under the law from the bondage of its condemnation. Thus perfectly and completely would He buy back all that man had lost, and unite unto Himself the nature which had sinned and fallen. But angels were a created nature, far nearer in relation to man. Might not the proposition be made to them? Would they not redeem the lost? Ah, willing they might be—we doubt not they were. But able they could never be. The redemption of a soul they must let alone for ever. The Son of God remained alone. His own arm must bring salvation. His righteousness must sustain Him. He was content to do the will of God, and His law was in His heart. Here was to be complete redemption. He would take the shoe, like Boaz, and acknowledge the obligation, and perform the duties of which it was the token. He would stand in the sinner's place. He would make Himself an offering in his stead. All this exercise and work of redeeming love was in the fulness of His own grace, without any connection of yours with it. Yes; just as the proposal of Boaz was without Ruth's presence or knowledge—made in her absence, while she was with her mother at home, and not to be made known to her until it was completed—so was this great proposal of the Son of God to be your Kinsman, and to fulfil for you all the kinsman's obligations, made without your counsel and accomplished without your help. This is the unsearchable riches of grace. We call it sovereign grace. It ruled over every obstacle. It met every difficulty. We call it free grace. It is extended to sinful man with no conditions. It invites him, and offers its bounties to him without any qualifications whatever. It announces a redemption all complete, and begs him to receive and to enjoy it. Thus God has chosen to redeem. And thus He has chosen us to be the subjects of His redemption. (*S. H. Tyng, D.D.*) *Fair dealing and good principle in Boaz* :—There are two things especially worthy of notice in this language of Boaz. 1. The spirit of candour and fair dealing by which it is distinguished. He knew the preference which both Naomi and Ruth had for himself; he was conscious too that he no longer regarded with indifference this beautiful daughter of Moab. His fine sense of honour was not blunted either by covetousness or by inclination, nor would his conscience allow him, even when seeking a good and generous end, to have recourse to sharp practice. Here is that "clear and round dealing which is the honour of man's nature." He was one of those men who, at the close of a transaction, could have borne to be cross-examined regarding his part in it by an enemy. 2. Then remark how much the following of principle simplifies a man's course. Boaz had his own wishes as to the way in which the transaction should terminate; and suppose him to have stooped, as thousands in his circumstances would have done, to crooked courses and carnal concealments, in order to make the matter end according to his wishes, what must have been his perplexity and anxiety, not to speak of his self-contempt and self-accusation! These are what Lord Bacon has called "the winding and crooked goings of the serpent, which goeth basely upon the belly and not upon the feet." But in following the course of simple duty, and making his inclinations and preferences wait on the disposal of God, he at once retained peace of conscience, self-respect, and a good name. "His eye was single, and therefore his whole body was full of light." (*A. Thomson, D.D.*)

Ver. 6. I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I mar mine own inheritance.—*The endangered inheritance* :—Many men mar noble inheritances. 1. The inheritance of **PHYSICAL HEALTH**. The ancients were right who spoke of a sound mind in a sound body as one of the best gifts of the gods. God has written His will upon the body as truly as upon the pages of the Bible. Every natural motion of the body is a revelation of the will and purpose of the Divine Creator. Ever since Christ was cradled in the manger at Bethlehem the body has been honoured, exalted, glorified. Ever since the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost the body has been the temple of the Third Person of the Trinity. The man who overworks his body sins against God. The man who by intemperance in eating or drinking unfits his body for discharging its normal functions degrades himself and dishonours the Almighty.

It is true that many men with broken bodies have accomplished wonderful results in life. The names of John Calvin, Robert Hall, and a score more, suggest themselves as illustrations. Let no man be discouraged who has inherited a weak body. Great souls have often dwelt in frail tenements, until the tired body was laid to its rest and the great soul went up in triumph to God. But let those who have received the inheritance of physical health prize it as one of the great gifts of life, care for it as one of the sacred inheritances of life, and lay it as a willing offering at the feet of the Lord Christ.

II. The inheritance of INTELLECTUAL CAPABILITIES. Of course there are great differences among men in these respects. But in our day ignorance is not simply a misfortune; it is a crime. Christian men must develop all their faculties to their highest possibilities. Every man is bound, by the most sacred obligations, to make the most of himself for time and for eternity. What a man is intellectually here will determine to some degree what he will be intellectually hereafter. The life to come is but the developed results of present conditions and attainments; that life is but the ripened fruit of the intellectual and moral seed sown in this life. Every Christian, because inspired by a sense of loyalty to Jesus Christ, will desire to develop his intellectual powers to their utmost degree. He cannot but wish to possess numerous and varied mental faculties for the salvation of men and for the greater glory of the Lord. Divine love in human hearts puts enlarged brains into human heads. Religion stimulates every noble faculty of the soul. It made John Bunyan the immortal dreamer; it made Samuel Bradburn one of the greatest workers and orators in his Church, a man of whom Dr. Abel Stevens said that "during forty years Samuel Bradburn was esteemed the Demosthenes of Methodism"; it made William Carey a profound scholar, a lofty thinker, a consecrated toiler, and an inspired genius. Christianity adorns culture with true symmetry and highest beauty; and culture, in turn, gives Christianity its fullest beauty and its grandest opportunity. They ought never to be separated. Each sweetly and divinely ministers to the other. Let no young man or woman neglect wide reading, careful study, earnest thought. Young Christians should be model students. They have Jesus Christ for their teacher and the noblest men and women in the world as their fellow-pupils.

III. The inheritance of a WORTHY FAMILY HISTORY. This is a gift above the worth of all mere financial values. A good name is more to be desired than gold, yea, than much fine gold. A good name is the ripe product of years of noble ancestral character. Is there a man who has wandered from his father's and his mother's God? Is there one who has lowered the standard of a noble family life and history? Is there one who is besmirching his name and staining his character by unholy thoughts and impure acts? In the name of that worthy family history, in the name of an ideal family life, in the name of the great God and Father of us all, I beseech him to stop and to stop now. He is marring his own inheritance. It is a blessed thing to be able to give a noble family inheritance to one's children. Let us carefully guard it; let us sacredly preserve it; let us continually honour it; let us never so live that our children shall be ashamed of the name they bear. Let us send it down to them as an honoured inheritance to which they shall add honours from all the generations to come.

IV. The inheritance of RELIGIOUS POSSIBILITIES. Intellectual attainments and religious experiences cannot be transmitted to our children. We can transmit our vices; but, strictly speaking, not our virtues. There is a sense, however, in which we can transmit tendencies toward good and God, or toward evil and the devil. There is a Divine truth in much that is said regarding heredity in our day. It is much for a man to be able to say, "My father's God"; it is vastly easier for such a man to say, "My Lord and my God," after having been taught to say, "My father's God." Children of Christian men and women stand upon a vastly higher plane of possibility than the children of ungodly men and women. The time may come when the natural will be much more like the supernatural than as we now see it. Indeed, there is a sense in which there is no distinction between the natural and supernatural. God is active in all spheres of nature. The possibility of being translated out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son ought to be realised in early childhood. No man, however far he may go into sin, can shake off entirely the influences of a godly parentage and of early religious training. I once talked with a man who had just recovered from a period of dissipation, and with broken voice and moist eyes, he said, "How could I so far forget myself, so greatly dishonour my sainted parents, and so wickedly disobey my father's God?" Oh! children of God's children, prize your privileges!

(R. S. MacArthur, D.D.)

Ver. 9. **I have bought all that was Elimelech's.—Redemption accomplished:**—This passage brings to our view the great subject of the gospel revelation—redemption accomplished in the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ in human flesh for guilty man. Boaz took his kinsman's shoes as a simple but solemn token of the agreement which he had now assumed. He called all the inhabitants and elders of his city to witness that he acknowledged all this responsibility, and was pledged to accomplish the redemption which was thus described and undertaken. The actual accomplishment of the work now depended upon the ability and the faithfulness of Boaz. Everything now rested upon his power and his truth. Was it not just so with the hope of man from the day of his fall to the day of the Saviour's manifestation and victory? He had undertaken to be man's Redeemer. Could He, and would He fulfil the wonderful promises which He had given, and upon which He had caused His people to place their trust? The history of the New Testament answers this all-important question. These sacred Scriptures reveal the facts of redemption accomplished; the work undertaken completely finished; the fidelity of the Kinsman Redeemer gloriously established; and His almighty power triumphantly made known. This is now the great message of the gospel to guilty man. It proclaims this accomplished work, and it begs man to accept and enjoy the blessings which are offered in it freely and without price. Like Boaz, Jesus bought back the whole inheritance for man. All that was lost in the first Adam is restored by the second. The Redeemer Himself now owns the inheritance which He has purchased. That which was Elimelech's is now the property of Boaz. That which was man's, and to be in the reward of man's obedience, is now Christ's, and only to be had in the freeness and fulness of His gift. It is His own inheritance, and He bestows it upon His people according to His will; according to the measure of the gift of Christ. We have everything in Him. Without Him we have nothing. He has bought back man also for Himself. His chosen flock are His purchased possession, and are to be to the praise of His glory for ever. But the people of Bethlehem were not merely the witnesses of this covenant of Boaz; they were partakers of his joy. They united in their supplications for abundant blessings upon the noble and exalted plan which Boaz had proclaimed. So angels, the witnesses of the covenant of our Redeemer, were more than silent witnesses also. When the foundation of this wonderful work was laid in the Divine covenant these morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy. When the Saviour appeared as a babe in Bethlehem they filled the heavens with their songs of praise and prayer: "Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth, goodwill to men." When He was travelling in the greatness of His strength, beneath His load of sorrow on the earth, they ministered unto Him and strengthened Him for His work. (*S. H. Tying, D.D.*)

Vers. 10, 11. **Ruth the Moabitess . . . have I purchased to be my wife.—The marriage of Boaz and Ruth:**—Two features which stand prominent in this description make it valuable for all time. 1. There is the publicity by which the interesting transaction was distinguished. All the people that were in the gate, and the elders, said, "We are witnesses." The laws and customs of every country not in the lowest stage of barbarism or in the foulest depths of licentiousness have provided that the conjugal relation shall be formed in the presence of qualified witnesses, and in the observance of certain well-understood ceremonies and forms. This is appointed for reasons of obvious propriety, especially to enforce fidelity, and to secure permanence to the connection, and, by a line sufficiently distinct and broad, to separate virtuous marriage from all illicit and impure connections. Clandestine marriages are always disreputable in themselves. Then—2. Let us not leave unnoticed the religious spirit in which the union was formed. The devout benedictions of the elders and the other witnesses were showered upon Boaz and his bride with all the lavish profusion of a most hearty goodwill, and prayers ascended for them to Him who in all ages has looked approvingly on virtuous wedlock. It is one of the marks of the divinity of our religion that it touches our humanity on all sides. Surely the formation of the marriage-bond pre-eminently ought to be "sanctified by the Word of God and prayer." (*A. Thomson, D.D.*) **A happy marriage:**—Ruth's marriage was a happy one—1. Because they could reckon on God's blessing, and doubtless both earnestly prayed for it. 2. Again, we may be sure it was a happy marriage, for there was a oneness of feeling between Boaz and Ruth. They both loved God. They were both journeying on one and the same road. They were partners for eternity. It matters little, whether earthly comforts be many or few; if the hearts

within it are bound together by that bond which is stronger even than the tie of affection—the bond of grace—then, be assured, there will be happiness. (*Hp. Oxenden.*) *What a true wife ought to be:*—Marriage, to a certain degree, a young man is to look upon from a utilitarian standpoint. A good wife is so much capital. She makes him to be, by a kind of grace, a great deal more than he is by nature. She contributes the qualities needed in order to convert his vigour into a safe as well as productive efficiency. She introduces, for instance, into his intellectual nature that ingredient of sentiment which intellect requires in order to be able to do its best work. Heart and brain need to conspire in order to the attainment of the true, and without caring to assert that man is naturally heartless, any more than I should wish to assume that woman is by nature brainless, yet heart in its way is just as precious as brain in its way, and woman, so long as she is untainted by the passion of wanting to be a man, will be that member of the connubial corporation that will in particular contribute to the capital stock its affectional element. Some women may resent this, but I would like to caution young men against cherishing matrimonial designs upon any woman who is likely to resent it. If what you want is a wife, and not merely a housekeeper, you must keep your eye well open for a warm bundle of femininity that will be to you in a personal way what the fire on the hearth is to you in a physical way—a fund of tropical comfort that will keep the stiffness out of your thinking, the frost out of your feeling, and the general machinery of your life in a condition of pleasurable activity. (*C. H. Parkhurst, D.D.*)

Vers. 17-22. *And they called his name Obed.*—*Little Obed:*—No doubt there were circumstances connected with the birth of this child which surrounded it with a special interest. But take the birth of any child, and while few events are more common, few can occur on the earth which in sober reality are more momentous. What a mystery hangs over its wondrous constitution of thought and matter, of soul and body! What a capacity is there of sin and suffering, of holy service and blessedness! What will be its future and final destiny? The hopes of friends at such a moment are naturally sanguine, woven far more of sunbeams than of shadows. And there were circumstances which made the congratulations of Ruth's friends peculiarly glad and hopeful; for this little smiling boy folded in his young mother's arms was not only the heir of Boaz but of Mahlon. He was to unite the family inheritances; he was to save the name of an old and honoured family in Bethlehem from being "extinguished in Israel," and to give to Naomi and to Ruth that position of honour and consequence in Jewish society which grew out of the maternal relation. There was now "hope concerning this tree, that it would yet bud and flourish." This will account to us for the warmth of the language in which the birth of Obed was hailed. To some it may appear strange that the congratulations of the friendly women were addressed to Naomi rather than to Ruth, the child's own mother. The explanation has in part been suggested already, in the fact that the birth of this child exercised so peculiar and propitious an influence over Naomi's social position and family fortunes. It secured to her the position of a tribe-mother. It may be, too, that those kindly women had known Naomi and been her comforters in the days of her deep affliction, when she appeared in the streets of Bethlehem claiming to be called Mara—"the woman with the sorrowful spirit"; and as they beheld her on this day of revived hopes and vanished clouds the same true sympathy that had formerly made them weep with her when she wept now made them rejoice with her when she rejoiced. That we are correct in this explanation is evident from the words of the women, in which, with such glad anticipations for the future, there is also a looking back upon the sorrowful past. "There shall be unto thee" in this child "a restorer of thy life and a nourisher of thine old age." How beautifully descriptive are these words of what children should aim to be to aged parents and relatives, and of what there is every reason to believe this child eventually became to Naomi. The former clause brings before us the picture of a tree in whose roots there remains a kind of lingering life, but which, assailed by storms and smitten by other unkindly influences, stands almost without leaf or blossom, with no birds making music in its branches, a blighted and forsaken thing. But there comes at length a genial influence of shower, and sunshine, and breeze, which quickens within it the vegetative life, and covers it with the leaves and blossoms of its earlier springs. Now, Naomi's life had been to her for many years like a long winter. But this little child would bring back to her the recollections and the joys of her happier days; the blank in her

heart would be filled up; she would find something to love and cherish without restraint, and this itself would be to her a well of happiness; she would remember Mahlon and Chilion in little Obed's childish sports and expanding mind; her thoughts, which had been too much turned inward upon her sorrows, would henceforth go outward upon him, and the future would not so much be a prolongation of the present as a return to her sunnier days—"He shall be unto thee a restorer of thy life," and he shall be unto thee "a nourisher of thine old age." The meaning of this is not exhausted by supposing that Naomi would never want the means of support while Obed lived, but that his affluence would be her riches. It includes in it, besides, those thousand varied acts of respect and tenderness which we are accustomed to describe by the name of kindness. In the case of persons in advanced years many sources of enjoyment are dried up, many frailties are induced, the senses are dulled, the power of motion is diminished, not a few of their companions have been removed into the other world, and they are apt to feel, in their infirmity and inaction, as if they had become useless to their generation. It is the duty of the young, and especially of the children and descendants of the aged, to endeavour to cheer them in the autumn of their life, to anticipate their wishes, to study their feelings, to make growing frailties only another reason for growing attentions, and, by kind words and kinder acts, to shed a calm sunshine on the path by which they are travelling to the tomb. Religion, and even the instincts of our human nature, command us to "stand up before the old man," and to put honour on the hoary head. And never do children appear more lovely than when they are thus seen nourishing the old age of a father or a mother. (*A. Thomson, D.D.*)

Lessons from the Book of Ruth:—I. In the first place it seems to me that the Book of Ruth exhibits to us AN ETERNAL LAW OF GOD'S KINGDOM; THAT IN THE WORST AND DARKEST TIMES OF THE CHURCH GOD HAS HAD HIS OWN PEOPLE. Ever since God had a Church on earth true spiritual religion has never been utterly extinguished. Faith can always say with the apostle that there is "a remnant according to the election of grace." When God's holy dove is driven from cities and the abodes of men, that bird of sweetest note can be heard singing in remote places, even in dens and in the clefts of the rocks. II. We may learn a lesson ON THE LAW OF SOCIAL LIFE. There is throughout the book a constant reference to the Levitical law. There is the goel, the redeeming kinsman. But I wish you specially to observe the beneficence of the law. I wish that some who speak of the barbarous character of the old law would take their Bibles and read the eighteenth chapter of Leviticus. You will there see that God ordained that a portion should be reserved for the poor and the stranger. The law gave a measure of wealth to the indigent. It solved in this way one of the most terrible problems of our modern society. While it did this there was an ample margin left for the exercise of private charity. The corner of the field was defined to mean a portion that in modern language would have been a poor-rate of fourpence in the pound. It was not a system of outdoor relief, for the Book of Ruth shows us that there was great delicacy to be observed in giving. Depend upon it, as the spirit of the Old Testament works, the bitter taunt will become less and less true that England is a paradise for the rich and a purgatory for the poor. III. There is AN EVANGELICAL LAW CONNECTING THIS BOOK OF THE OLD TESTAMENT WITH CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD. IV. Lastly, we learn THE LAW WHICH PERVADES THE LIFE OF EVERY TRUE BELIEVER. We may learn that our lives are not random things, and that there is no such thing as chance about the Christian's life. This story of Ruth, like every story of the highest sort, would lead us to perfect trust in Him who wants His own dear children to lift up their hands to Him when in darkness. They must wrestle in the darkness before they can face the sunrise. God seems to keep silence when we pray. We ask, and God seems not to give us the things for which we pray. Ah! but He gives us far better. (*Abp. William Alexander.*)

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