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THE EXPOSITOR.

THE BOOK OF RUTH.

I.—THE SOJOURN IN MOAB.

Chapter 1, verses 1-5.

THE Book of Ruth was, as we have seen, probably written in the time of David, that is some century and a half after the events narrated in the Book occurred. The opening sentence of the Book shews that the Author was going back for his story to a past age. He speaks of "the days when the Judges judged" as over and gone. He is as obviously telling the story of a bygone time as an author of the present day would be were he to open with the sentence, "Now it came to pass in the days when men travelled by coaches and waggons." And, probably, he indicates the days of the Judges as the date of his story in order to remind us that in those days, as there was no settled order of government, "every man did that which was right in his own eyes." Elimelech might go and come as he pleased, there being no authority to restrain him.

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. Now Bethlehem-in-Judah was "remarkably well watered in comparison with other parts of Palestine."¹ The pastures of its limestone downs were famous for their fine rich grass, and its valleys were covered over with corn. 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 family 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. When his sorely bereaved widow returned to her native place, "*all the city* were moved about her," as about some well-known person once held in general repute, and cried, "*This Naomi!*" She herself confesses, "I went out *full*, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty," evidently contrasting her present penury with her former opulence. The kinsmen of Elimelech, Boaz and that unnamed kinsman who declined to redeem his inheritance, were men conspicuous for high character and large possessions. So that we have every reason to believe that Elimelech was a man well endowed and in good esteem. The probability is that he was rich in flocks and herds, a master shepherd such as Beth-

¹ Ritter's "Comparative Geography of Palestine."

lehem has constantly produced; and that it was to find pastures for his famishing flocks that he went to sojourn in Moab.

His own name, and the names of his wife and children, confirm this conclusion. For *Elimelech* is compounded of *El*=God, and *melech*=King, and means "My God is my King;" and Hebrew scholars have noted that all names compounded with *melech* are borne by distinguished persons. *Naomi*, or *Noomi*, means "the lovely, or gracious, one." *Mahlon* and *Chilion* probably mean "joy" and "ornament." And as we know that the Hebrew names were commonly expressive of character, and in the earlier ages even prophetic of character, we may perhaps infer from these names that the father was a kingly kind of man, the mother a lovely and gracious woman, and the two boys the very pride and joy of their parents' hearts.

They are all expressly called "*Ephrathites* of Bethlehem-judah." *Ephrathah* was the ancient name of the district in which Bethlehem stood; and probably the word denotes the fruitfulness of this district as insured by its abundance of water,—*Euphrates* and *Ephrathah* seem to be kindred words. *Ephrathites*, then, are *natives* of the city or district as distinguished from mere sojourners or residents; *born* Bethlehemites, and not men of other districts who had come to settle in it: and possibly the antique word may also here convey an intimation that Elimelech belonged to one of the *ancient* and well-born families of the district.

So that, on the whole, we may conceive of Elimelech as a native of the fertile district of Bethlehem,

a member of an ancient, noble, and distinguished family, a man of substance and mark, with a lovely wife and two bright promising sons fast rising into manhood.

This man, pinched by famine and fearing to lose his wealth, resolved to emigrate to the Field of Moab, which, untouched by drought, was green with grass and wealthy with corn. But why did he select *Moab*? The usual resort of the clans of Canaan and its vicinity in time of famine was Egypt. Why, then, did not Elimelech, like his great forefathers, either go or send down into Egypt for corn?

The probability is that he would have sent or gone if the road to Egypt had not been closed. All the notes of time in the Book imply that it was while the venerable but miserable Eli was Judge that Elimelech resolved to leave his ancestral fields: and while Eli was Judge there was perpetual war with Philistia. When the Philistines heard that the tribes of Israel were oppressed by famine, they would be sure to guard the high road to Egypt, in order to prevent their famishing foes from procuring supplies from the vast public granaries of that opulent and powerful empire.

With the way to Egypt stopped, Elimelech would naturally turn to the Field of Moab; for Moab had much to attract both the farmer and the shepherd. The name "Moab" stands in the Bible for three districts on the east of the Dead Sea; but we can tell in which of these it was that Elimelech found a home and a grave, for one of these districts is expressly called "*The Field of Moab*,"—which is the

technical phrase used throughout this Book—while another was called “The *Land* of Moab,” and a third “The *Dry*,”—*i. e.*, the Dry Canton—“of Moab.” This district or canton—“The Field of Moab,” or Moab proper—has the precipices which border the Dead Sea on its western limit, a semi-circular sweep of hills on the east, behind which lies the Arabian Desert; on the north it is defended by the tremendous chasm down which the river Arnon foams: while on the south the two ranges between which it lies run together, meet, and shut it in. It was a high table-land, dotted with cities, on which the grass grew sweet and strong; and it has been in all ages, as it is even now, a favourite haunt of pastoral tribes.

The prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah, who evidently knew Moab and the Moabites well, give us a graphic and artistic sketch of them. In their “burdens,” or “dooms,” the men of Moab “appear as high-spirited, wealthy, numerous, and even to a certain extent civilized, enjoying a wide reputation and popularity. With a metaphor which well expresses at once the pastoral wealth of the country and its commanding, almost regal, position, but which cannot be conveyed in a translation, Moab is depicted as the strong sceptre, the beautiful staff, whose fracture will be bewailed by all about him, and by all who know him. In his cities we discern ‘a great multitude’ of people living in ‘glory’ and in the enjoyment of great ‘treasure,’ crowding the public squares, the housetops, and the ascents and descents of the numerous high places and sanctuaries, where the ‘priests and princes’ of Chemosh, or Baal-peor, minister to the anxious

devotees. Outside the towns lie the 'plentiful fields,' luxuriant as the renowned Carmel, and the vineyards and gardens of 'summer fruits;' the harvest is being reaped and the 'hay stored in abundance,' the vineyards and presses are crowded with peasants gathering and treading the grapes, the land resounds with the joyful shouts of the vintagers."¹

The Moabites, moreover, were of kin to the Israelites; for, while the men of Israel were the sons of Abraham, the men of Moab were descendants of his nephew Lot: and, though there was often war between the two nations, and war as 'bitter as kinsmen's quarrels commonly are, at least in the intervals of peace very friendly relations were often maintained between individual members or families of the two races.

Here, then, in the pastoral canton of Moab—which, though it plays a great part in ancient history, is hardly so large as the shire of Huntingdon, and is not so far from Bethlehem as Huntingdon from London—Elimelech might hope to find a good pasture for his flocks and herds, if only he were able to purchase it, as no doubt he was, and would receive the welcome which awaits the "full," or wealthy, sojourner in almost every land.

Was it *wrong* of him to abandon his native land, in order to sojourn with Moab until the famine was past? No doubt, it was wrong. Not that emigration is a sin, or even emigration to an alien, and sometimes hostile, land. We, perhaps, are better pleased to hear of Englishmen migrating to one of

¹ George Grove, in Smith's "Dictionary of the Bible," art. *Moab*.

our English colonies than to hear of them sailing to a land in which the English name is, or may be, held in suspicion and dislike. But who would say that it was *wrong* for an English family, on the compulsion of some strong motive, to settle in France, or Spain, or America? What made it wrong for Elimelech to migrate to Moab, wrong according to the Hebrew standard, was that he was abandoning his place among the elect people, to sojourn among heathen whose social life, whose very worship, was unutterably licentious and degrading. If it were right of *him* to abandon his place, it would not have been wrong for all Bethlehem, nay, for all Judah; and then how could the Divine purpose concerning Israel have taken effect? Elimelech was a wealthier man than many of his neighbours; and if *they* could bear the brunt of famine rather than forsake the land of their fathers and expose their children to the seductions of heathen license, why could not he? True, he is not directly blamed for his error in the Book of Ruth, which is written in the most considerate and generous tone throughout; but that the writer of the Book thought him to blame, and held the calamities which fell on him and his house to be a judgment on his sin, there is scarcely room to doubt.

What these calamities were we are told in verses 3-5. Elimelech lost his life while seeking a livelihood, and found a grave where he had sought a home. And, apparently, this "judgment" fell on him at once, judgment treading on the very heels of offence. Before his sons were married, he was taken away from the evil to come. For we can

hardly doubt that it would have seemed evil to him that his sons should marry strange women, women of a race of which God had said, "Thou shalt make no covenant with them: and thou shalt not make marriage with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto their son, nor shalt thou take their daughter for thy son; for it would turn away thy children from me, and they will serve false gods."¹ The sin of these young men in marrying strange women is not expressly denounced as a sin in the Story, any more than that of their father in forsaking the land of promise, 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 Hebrew law: for, among the Hebrews, marriage was regarded as a religious covenant; and St. Paul does but utter the national conviction 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

¹ Deut. vii. 2, ff.

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., ver. 12) ; and Orpah, as we are expressly told (Chap. i. ver. 15), "went back to her people and *her gods.*"

Nevertheless, the home of Naomi in the Field of Moab seems to have been a very happy, although it was not by any means a prosperous, home. Gradually, as the years passed, the widow and sons of Elimelech appear to have lost all that they had, so that at her return to Bethlehem Naomi came back "empty." But, for once, love did not fly out of the window as poverty stepped in at the door ; for Naomi prays (Chap. i. ver. 6) that the Lord will deal kindly with Ruth and Orpah, because *they had dealt kindly with the dead and with her.* Orpah, probably, means "*kind,*" and Ruth "*rose,*"—pretty and pleasant names both, denoting grace and fragrant beauty. Mahlon and Chilion mean "joy" and "ornament." So that at the head of the diminished household we have the lovely and gracious Naomi ; and then "Joy" has for wife the beautiful and fragrant "Rose," and "Ornament" the graceful "Hind." The very names are idyllic, and seem to indicate, what the facts confirm, that the household was a singularly pure and happy one, characterized by a certain rustic grace and refinement.

But "Death strikes with equal foot the rustic

cottage and the palaces of kings." And after ten years, in which the members of this notable family seem to have opposed a constant face to the austere and threatening brow of Misfortune, and to have grown the dearer to each other for the sorrows and calamities they shared together, Mahlon and Chilion, still young men, followed their father to the grave, and Naomi was left a childless widow. Songs of mirth were exchanged for songs of mourning. The three men of the household had gone to their long home, and the three bereaved women were left to weep together and to comfort each other as best they might.

Thus far the Book of Ruth resembles that Symphony of Beethoven's, in which the songs of birds, the cheerful hum of a holiday crowd, and all the pleasant voices of a rustic merry-making, are hushed by the crash of a sudden and threatening storm.

The fact that both Ruth and Orpah were minded to accompany the destitute Naomi, when she returned to her native city, confirms all that has been said of the pure and happy family life of the household into which they had been admitted. Mahlon and Chilion must have been men of worth and character to win so sincere and stedfast an affection from these two daughters of Moab. And the gracious Naomi must have carried herself both wisely and graciously to these young wives, or she would not have inspired them with a love so devoted and self-sacrificing. And yet, when once they had breathed the pure atmosphere of a Hebrew home, it is no marvel that Ruth and Orpah were reluctant to lose it. To the

men of Moab women were but toys to be played with while they retained their charm, and to be cast aside so soon as some brighter toy took the eye. But in ancient Israel, as happily also in modern England, the worship of God was, as a rule, conjoined with a pure domestic life, a life made pure and sweet by chastity and kindness, by respect for women, by love for children. No doubt Ruth and Orpah were profoundly impressed by the purity and fidelity which distinguished the Hebrew from the Moabitish home, and repaid it with tenderness and a grateful attachment to the family into which they had been welcomed. It speaks well for them that, after living with them for ten years and watching with motherly jealousy how they bore themselves to her sons, Naomi can thank them with impassioned sincerity and tenderness for their "kindness" to the dead and to her.

Their kindness to *her* is even more remarkable, perhaps, than their kindness to their husbands; for the ancient combine with modern authors to complain of the unhappy relations which obtain between the daughter- and the mother-in-law, and in laying the blame of it on the latter. "The mother-in-law has forgotten that *she* was ever a daughter-in-law," says an old German proverb. Terence laments that all mothers-in-law have ever hated their son's wives; and Juvenal affirms that "domestic concord is impossible, so long as the mother-in-law lives." And, no doubt, among selfish people, who confound jealousy with love, the relation is apt to be a source of irritation and discord; the mother is loth to relinquish her rights in her son, and the wife is forward to

assert her rights in her husband : both are apt to forget that their common love for the same person should draw them together and make them of one heart and mind. But in lands where the home-life is pure and tender, and among persons of an unselfish and generous nature, even this relation becomes a very happy one. And, possibly, we may accept it as the weightiest testimony to the tenderness and purity of domestic life among the better Hebrews, that both the prophet Micah (Chap. vii. ver. 6) and our Lord Himself (Luke xii. 53) imply that the tie between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law was as close and sacred as that between mother and daughter, or father and son ; that both affirm it to be one of the last signs of utter social division and corruption when the daughter-in-law rises up against her mother-in-law. "Happy is the nation that is in such a case." For men labour, as well as fight, for hearth and altar as for nothing else ; and when the hearth is itself an altar, when the home is bright and sacred with a Divine Presence and law, then indeed there is no place like home.

II.—THE RETURN TO BETHLEHEM.

Chapter 1, verses 6–22.

Than the scene depicted in these verses there is hardly any more beautiful and affecting in the whole range of the Old Testament Scriptures. All three actors in it are admirable, and are admirably portrayed. Even Orpah shews a love and a devotion which command our respect, although her love did

not rise to the full heroic pitch ; while of Ruth and Naomi it is hard to say which is the more admirable,—Naomi, in putting from her her sole comfort and stay, or Ruth, in leaving all that she had to become the stay and comfort of Naomi's declining years. The exquisite and pathetic beauty of the scene has been recognized from of old, and has inspired painter after painter, musician after musician : while Ruth's famous reply to Naomi's dissuasive entreaties takes high rank among the sentences which the world will not willingly let die.

It is not an easy, nor is it an altogether pleasant, task to break up this pathetic Story into its separate sentences that we may analyse them and see what they mean and imply ; but it is a necessary task : for only as we trace out the meaning of the separate sentences can we hope to reconstruct the Story with fuller knowledge and permit it to make its due impression upon us.

Whether Elimelech and his wife felt that they were entering on a doubtful course when they left the Holy Land to sojourn with the heathen of Moab, we have no means of knowing. But we have much reason to think that, during her ten years' sojourn in the Field of Moab, Naomi came to regard it as a sinful course. The loss, first, of her husband, and, then, of her sons, came upon her as a Divine rebuke ; and as she laid her sons, cut off in their prime, in an alien grave, the thought and purpose of return, return to God as well as to the land of God, seem to have taken possession of her heart. This purpose was probably strengthened both by the hope that, in her poverty and bereavement, she

would receive help and comfort from her wealthy Hebrew kinsmen, and, still more, by the happy tidings, which now reached her, that the famine was at an end, that the valleys of Bethlehem were once more covered over with corn and its hills with flocks. In the fine Hebrew phrase, "*The Lord had remembered his people, to give them bread.*" The pious Hebrew saw God in all things. What we call "The bounty of Nature" was, for him, the immediate gift of God. His bread came straight from Heaven, though it came through the processes of husbandry and the benignity of the seasons, and shewed that God was thinking, and thinking graciously, of him. And when the fields yielded no food, and the flock was cut off from the fold and the ox from the stall, *that* was because God had "forgotten" him. Not that the pious Israelite conceived of God as losing sight of him in the vastness of his empire and the multiplicity of his cares. What he meant by God's forgetting him was that God was offended with him for his sins, was ceasing to be gracious to him, had purposely put him out of his mind, and was therefore refusing to make his fields and toils fruitful to him. He believed, what we too much forget, that Nature is instinct with a Divine Presence; that it rises into life and fruitfulness when that Presence is auspicious, and sinks into sterility and death when that Presence is clouded with sorrow and indignation at the sins of men. When the Lord "remembered" his people, *i.e.*, when He saw with pleasure that they were doing righteousness and shewing mercy, then He gave them bread. When He turned away from their bold affronts against his righteous

and loving Will, then famine and disaster stalked through the land.

In *this* sense God had forgotten Israel for ten years. And, no doubt, the calamities which signified his displeasure with them produced their usual effect,—inducing humility and penitence. Now, therefore, He remembers them, and once more the land smiles with plenty. And now that He is once more gracious, may there not be grace and a blessing even for the impoverished and afflicted Naomi, if she too returns to Him and once more takes shelter under his wings? Perchance, there may. At all events she will put Him to the proof. And so she starts on her homeward way.

But she does not start alone. Her two daughters-in-law resolve to accompany her. She, apparently, is not aware of their intention, and supposes they have only come to see her off and indulge in a last embrace, although they regarded themselves as already on the way to the land of Judah (ver. 7). When, therefore, they reach the Ford of the Arnon, on the northern boundary of the Field of Moab, or, perhaps, when they reach the Fords of the Jordan, the eastern boundary of Judah, Naomi bids them return each to her mother's house, and prays both that the Lord will deal kindly with them, as they have dealt with her dead and with her, and that He will grant that they may each find "an asylum" in the house of a new husband. As she clasps them in a parting embrace, they lift up their voices and weep. They protest, "Nay, but we will return with thee unto thy people." And, now, Naomi has the delicate difficult task of breaking to them, as gently

as she may, the sad secret that, if they go with her, they will find no welcome from her people, no kindness from any but herself.

If we would understand the scene, and especially the stress laid on these young widows finding new husbands, we must remember that in the East of antiquity, as in many Eastern lands to this day, the position of an unmarried woman, whether maid or widow, was a very unhappy and perilous one. Only in the house of a husband could a woman be sure of respect and protection. Hence the Hebrews spoke of the husband's house as a woman's "*menuchah*," or "rest,"—her secure and happy asylum from servitude, neglect, license. It was such an "asylum" of honour and freedom that Naomi desired for Orpah and Ruth. But, as she had to explain to them, such an "asylum," while it might be open to them in Moab, would be fast closed against them in Judah. In marrying them her sons had sinned against the Hebrew law. That sin was not likely to be repeated by Israelites living in their own land. Yet how is Naomi to tell them of this fatal separation between the two races? how is she to make these loving women aware that, if they carry out their resolve to go with her, they must resign all hope of honour and regard?

She discharges her difficult task with infinite delicacy. They, of course, had no thought of marrying any sons that might hereafter be born to the widowed Naomi. Such a thought could not possibly have entered their minds. Why, then, does Naomi lay such emphasis on the utter unlikelihood of her having sons, and of their waiting for them even if

she should have them? Simply to convey to them that, if they went with her, *they would have no hope but in herself*. What she meant was: "I know and love you: and, had I sons, I would take you with me, that, in their homes, you might find the asylum every woman needs and craves. But I have none, nor am I likely to have any, nor could you wait for them if I had. And, outside my household, there is no prospect for you; for the men of Israel may not take to wife the daughters of Moab. Alas, it is more bitter for me to tell you this than for you to hear it. It is harder for me than for you that we must part. But the hand of the Lord is gone out against me. I have no hope for the future. I must walk my darkened path alone. But you, you may still find an asylum with the people of your own race. *Your* future may be bright. You will at least have one another. Go, then, and return each to her mother's house."

This, I apprehend, was what Naomi meant by the words which sound so strangely to us (vers. 11-13): this was what Ruth and Orpah would understand her to mean. And if we cannot wonder that the cheerless and perilous prospect was too much for Orpah's love, let us all the more admire the constancy of her whom even this prospect could not terrify. Ruth risked everything which a woman holds dear rather than leave her "mother" to walk and suffer alone. And it may be doubted whether in all the crowded records of womanly heroism and self-sacrifice we anywhere meet a courage and devotion surpassing hers.

And yet, in this contest of self-sacrificing love it

is hard to tell whether the palm should be awarded to Ruth or to Naomi. Has not Naomi discharged her full duty of dissuasion in placing the discomforts and dangers of her lot before her daughter? She, at all events, thinks that she has not. When Orpah has kissed her and gone back, while Ruth is still "cleaving" to her, she renews her entreaties and dissuasions. "Thy sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; go thou also. It is not simply, or mainly, that we belong to different races: we worship different gods. It is *this* which really separates us, and makes it impossible that you should find an asylum in Judah. Return, then, after thy sister." When we consider how dark and solitary Naomi's path must have been had Ruth yielded to her entreaties, we cannot but feel that these two noble women were well matched, that it is hard to say in which of them love was the more generous and self-forgetting.

If, in the judgment of the world, Ruth carries off the palm, it is, in part, because we expect more of a mother in Israel than of a daughter of Moab: but it is still more, I think, in virtue of the exquisite and pathetic words in which her reply to the dissuasions of Naomi is couched. Her vow has stamped itself on the very heart of the world; and that, not because of the beauty of its form simply, though even in our English Version it sounds like a sweet and noble music, but because it expresses, in a worthy form and once for all, the utter devotion of a genuine and self-conquering love. It is the spirit which informs and breathes through these melodious words that makes them so precious to us, and that also

renders it impossible to utter any fitting comment on them. They shine most purely in their own light. *"Intreat me not to leave thee, nor to return from following after thee; for whither thou goest, I will go, and where thou lodgest, I will lodge. Thy people is my people, and thy God my God. Where thou diest, I will die, and there will I be buried. JEHOVAH do so to me and more also, if aught but death part thee and me."* One wonders where the woman found breath to utter such words as these as she lay weeping on Naomi's breast, that her voice did not break into inarticulate sobs and sighs under the weight of so impassioned a tenderness.

I cannot pretend to interpret them, to dwell on them and bring out their beauty. Every heart must do that for itself. But three points should be noted by all who study them. (1) That, in these words, Ruth meets every dissuasive plea of Naomi's. Naomi has no home, no asylum, to offer her; and Ruth replies, "Where thou lodgest, I will lodge." Naomi reminds her that she is going among an alien people, who worship another God; and Ruth replies, "Thy people is my people, and thy God my God." Naomi urges that there will be no brightness, no *life*, in her life; and Ruth replies that she is content to die so that she may share Naomi's grave. (2) That Ruth adopts Naomi's God *as yet* purely from love of Naomi. And (3) that she shews how instantly and entirely she adopts Naomi's religion by sealing her vow with the Hebrew oath and by calling on the God of the Hebrews: "*Jehovah* do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me."

When, from this impassioned invocation of the

Name of the Lord, Naomi perceives that Ruth is "stedfastly minded" to go with her, she ceases to dissuade her: and the two noble women, united in an indissoluble bond of love, go on their way side by side.

Fuller's comment on verse 19 is: "Naomi was formerly *a woman of good quality and fashion*, of good rank and repute; otherwise her return in poverty had not so generally been taken notice of. Shrubs may be grubbed to the ground, and none miss them; but every one marks the falling of a cedar. Grovelling cottages may be levelled to the earth, and none observe them; but every traveller takes notice of the fall of a steeple. Let this comfort those to whom God hath given small possessions. Should He visit them with poverty, and take from them what little they have, yet their grief and shame would be the less; they should not have so many fingers pointing at them, so many eyes staring on them, so many words spoken of them; they might lurk in obscurity: it must be a Naomi, a person of eminency and estate, whose poverty must move a whole city." In these days we should hardly think of calling Naomi "a woman of good quality and fashion;" but Fuller's inference from the general excitement caused by her return is, on the whole, a fair one, though it is somewhat quaintly worded. She must have been a woman of substance and repute about whom all Bethlehem was moved. Their exclamation, "*This Naomi!*" expresses the general astonishment at the change which had passed upon her. No doubt the little hamlet had been all aflame with gossip when, ten years before, the rich sheep-master, Elimelech,

had left it, and many pious brows had been shaken over his sin in going to sojourn among the heathen. And, no doubt, on Naomi's return, many who would have shared that sin if they could, and many who had committed far worse sins than any of which she had been guilty, once more shook their heads in grave rebuke, and were forward to recognize the judgments of an offended God in the calamities which had befallen her. It may be feared that there was more blame than pity in the ejaculation, " *This Naomi!* "

Naomi confesses both the impoverishing change that had passed upon her and the sin of which she had become conscious, and is more than ever conscious now that she sees it reflected from the rebuking faces of her former neighbours. The passionate exclamation with which she meets their wonder and reproach is full of pathos. " Call me not Naomi, but call me *Mara* ('bitter'), for the Almighty hath dealt very *bitterly* with me!" Life is no more pleasant to me, but full of bitterness. Call me, then, by a new name answering to my new condition, a name as bitter as my afflictions. There is, too, a strange blending of sadness and generosity in her confession: " I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home empty. . . . The Lord hath testified against me; the Almighty hath afflicted me." For while, like her neighbours, she feels the humbling contrast between her former wealth—wealth of happiness and of hope as well as of possessions—and her present poor and unfriended condition, she also feels that it was *because* she went away when she was full that she has been

brought home empty. She attributes her "emptiness" to the Lord, but her going away to herself alone. *That* was not the Lord's doing; it was a sin against his will. Nor was it the doing of Elimelech and her sons: at least she casts none of the blame of it on them, although, in all probability, it was they who decided to go, and she had but followed their wishes or command. She takes the whole blame on herself. She confesses that, in leaving "the land of the promise," she was walking after her own will, not the will of God. But, though she confesses her own sin, she utters no reproach against the beloved dead. "I went because it was my will to go; and now God has taught me, by all I have suffered and lost, that it was wrong to go. He has justly emptied me of all my possessions, all my hopes."

The whole city was moved at her return; but no one seems to have been moved by her penitence and grief. She is left alone, save for "Ruth, *the Moabitess*" (verse 22), as the sacred historian once more calls her, to bring out the contrast between the tenderness of this heathen outcast and the austerity of the pious Hebrews of Bethlehem.

Thus far, then, the Story is sad enough; it is a story of loss, of shame, of sore bereavement; and but for the fidelity of Ruth we should leave Naomi—in her native place, too, and among her kin—alone, deeming herself forsaken of God and afflicted, because she saw herself abandoned and despised of men. Even the first Chapter of the Book, however, does not close without a hint of brighter days in store. Love and fidelity are always acceptable to

God. And hence we might infer that the love and fidelity of Ruth would, in due time, meet with their reward. But we are not left to inference and conjecture. The last verse of the Chapter tells us that it was "*in the beginning of barley-harvest*" that Naomi and Ruth came to Bethlehem. And we know that, before the harvest was over, the mercy of God to these two loving women rejoiced over the judgments with which He had afflicted them. It was in the harvest-field that Ruth met Boaz, and with Boaz that "asylum" of honour and freedom which Naomi had thought it impossible for her to meet among the sons of Israel. The night of weeping is passed; a morning of joy is about to break upon them. How, and how wonderfully, this new day dawned on their sad but faithful hearts we shall see as we study the succeeding Chapters of the Book.

THE PROLOGUE OF ST. JOHN'S GOSPEL.

II.—THE LOGOS.

THE three questions which we have to answer are these: Whence did the Evangelist derive his notion of the Logos? What is the origin of this unusual term? What the motive which led to its employment here?

First of all, it is of importance to establish one fact, that the Prologue does not contain a single thought which goes beyond the testimony of Christ in the Fourth Gospel and the teaching of the Old Testament read by this light. B. Weiss¹ mentions

¹ "Johanneischer Lehrbegriff," 1862.