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SERMONIC.

CHRIST'S UNION WITH THE SINNER.

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*Ruth the Moabitess have I purchased to be
my wife.*—Ruth iv: 10.

If we could believe that the Bible was inspired to furnish man with an exalted literature—if we could recognize as its object the cultivation of the æsthetic faculty—if we could regard the development of beauty as its normal and primal function, we could easily account for the presence of the Book of Ruth within its bounds. Never was there so sweet a story in so narrow compass. A few skillful and easy strokes of the artist's brush, and we have before us a picture of unequalled pathos, varied in its incidents, and yet one in its meaning and influence. The famine-driven family; the exile's residence; the marriages soon clouded by death; the return home; the sad contrast with former prosperity; the daughter-in-law's faithful affection; the scenes in the harvest field; the rich lord's compassion, and the final exaltation of the ruined family, form a rare sketch of life's vicissitudes and virtue's reward.

The graceful grouping, the subdued colors, the fair figure of Ruth herself, and the quiet back-ground of rural life, elicit from every emotional nature not only admiration, but affection. Theocritus and Virgil could not have done this. Neither Homer nor Herodotus could have told so tender a story. No work of art, ancient or modern, could, by so brief an application, create in the reader's heart such an April day of sunshine and shower as does this inimitable sketch of the young Moabitess.

But we know that the Bible was given us for higher than æsthetic purposes. It is true that it embraces the highest forms of poetry and prose, and that all styles of beauty are found within its leaves; but this is only the *clothing*, the *garment*, of the truth. The truth itself lies within, and it is of this sacred occupant that the Bible is the ark. The vast moral truths of God's government, and especially of His merciful interposition for man's salvation, form the kernel of divine revelation; and he who only discovers the *beauty* of the Scriptures sees no farther than the shell. There are many of refined taste who cannot fail to admire the fair

[The first several sermons are reported in full; the remainder are given in condensed form. Every care is taken to make these reports correct; yet our readers must not forget that it would be unfair to hold a speaker responsible for what may appear in a condensation, made by another, of his discourse.—Ed.]

form of Jesus in the Gospels, who hold His beautiful life as "a joy forever," and yet who reject the great saving-truth His life of beauty bore within it, and yield no response to His invitations to penitence, faith and salvation.

Beneath, then, the beauty of the story of Ruth, let us search for its lesson of divine truth, which gives it a place in the sacred record. It cannot be a mere *historical* contribution, for then the *details* would have been unnecessary; the enlargement of the narrative sends us seeking in another direction. We have selected the text as the culminating point of the whole story, and the key to its spiritual meaning. We believe that this little Book of Ruth was given to explain the relation which God bears to us as our Redeemer; and this it does by giving us an instance of the action of a Jewish human Redeemer according to the Hebrew law, which was typical of the divine and spiritual redemption. Boaz is the redeemer in this narrative, and, as such, foreshadows Christ, while Ruth represents fallen man. As a Moabitess, accursed by the law, she well exhibits our alienation from God and our condemnation under His justice, and, as a houseless pauper, she exhibits the misery and helplessness of our natural condition.

The Goel, or redeemer, in the Hebrew law had three distinct and yet intimately-related duties to perform: *First*, to slay the murderer of his deceased kinsman; *secondly*, to marry the widow; and, *thirdly*, to restore the lost inheritance. He might have all or only one or two of these duties incumbent upon him. In the case of Boaz and Ruth, the last two offices were assumed, the first not being needed (Mahlon, Ruth's husband, having died a natural death); and yet, in a full view of the typical power of the Jewish usage, it is necessary to regard this feature of the law, which alone is not illustrated in the story of Ruth. Let us, then, as preliminary to the more direct examination of the case of Boaz,

notice the first work of the Goel, or redeemer:—

I. It was his to *slay the deceased friend's murderer*. In this act he appeared, not as in the waywardness of inconsiderate anger, but as the legal avenger of blood. The custom obtained in many barbarous nations, and doubtless was there mingled with much revenge and cruelty; but this barbarous custom seems to have been the tradition of an old and divine institution, which, from the very gate of Eden, symbolled forth the coming Messiah. To such an institution Cain appears to have referred when that conscience-smitten murderer exclaimed, "Any one that findeth me shall slay me!" In the Jewish law the usage was reduced to a rigid system, the Goel, or revenger of blood, appointed, and cities of refuge denoted for the protection of the *accidental* slayer. The pursuer of the murderer followed his track and dealt the blow, strengthened by the authority of law, and felt himself not the prosecutor of a private revenge, but the appointed agent of the divine justice. He was not giving expression to low, selfish hatred, but was the expounder of eternal right. Whatever human frailty entered into his motives, this higher character marked his action, and it was this official character which made him so eminently a type of the great Redeemer of our sin-smitten race; for Christ appears in behalf of our murdered souls as the divinely-appointed Avenger of our blood. Satan, the enemy who in Eden struck the fatal blow, has, from that hour, heard the footfall of his pursuer behind him. In the promise to Adam and Eve; in the spirit of prophecy outpoured from Enoch to Malachi; in the Jewish polity and ritual; in the Incarnation of God's only Son; in the gift of miracles, and in the proclamation of the Gospel, the Divine Avenger has approached nearer and nearer to the old murderer; and the day is not far distant (the Church fondly hopes) when the descending stroke shall cleave Satan to the dust, and the full measure of his deserts

shall be awarded him. A very proper corollary, from this view of the Great Avenger, has regard to our entire dependence upon the Divine Redeemer for the subjugation of sin. It is His strength only which can hurl down the enemy. We are in the power of sin—sin has slain us—we can no more resist and overcome sin than a dead body can rise up and revenge itself upon its murderer. The whole work, therefore, of avenging us of our great adversary must be wrought by another. It is the principle of faith which connects us with this wrought-work, and, going beyond the type, renews our life in righteousness. There is a mystery, most certainly, in this resurrection of the dead soul; but the mystery, involving the unsolvable problem of God's sovereignty and man's free-agency, is only to be met by the submission of the soul to the voice of the Redeemer. The mind must cease its criticism, and the heart receive the inexplicable truth. Still further, the Divine Avenger is our only help in sanctification. We could not convert ourselves, neither can we sanctify ourselves. The whole work of slaying sin is in Christ's hands, and its efficacy, in our own case, depends upon our faith, which binds us to Him. It is here we see how necessary is prayer (the voice of faith) to spiritual growth. Unceasing prayer is perpetual victory.

II. The second work of the Hebrew Goel, or redeemer, was to *marry the deceased friend's widow*, and this act is especially suggested by the text. By this close union the redeemer identified himself with the forsaken. He not only showed pity, but love. He made her cause strictly his own. The marriage at once removed the reproach which, in Oriental lands, fell upon the widow, and also renewed her affections and her joys. Her loneliness was ended, her poverty ceased, her mourning garments were laid aside, and the wedding feast invited her to cheerfulness. In the avenging work of the Goel, we saw our likeness in the murdered man, while the avenger of blood was our

divine Friend; but, in this part of the Goel's work, human nature is indicated by the widow; the former husband is God, who, by reason of sin, is as dead to us, and the Goel is Christ, our Redeemer. The type readily and naturally shifts with the changing attitudes of our Savior. The relation betokened in the text, while it fills the soul with an amazement that almost takes the form of unbelief, also summons the most tender sensibilities of the heart to its grateful acknowledgment. It is the very apex of the pyramid of grace—the glorious consummation of the interposing mercy and love of God to sinners, utterly beyond all human invention to devise or suggest; its exhibition being itself a witness of a divine revelation. The relation is a restoration of the original dignity and bliss of the first ancestor of our race, and in this restored relation we find the *heart* of God, the affections and emotions of the Divine nature occupying the place of chief activity. No cold, impassive deity, no dry and iron law receives the sinner with a mechanical welcome, but the *love* of Jesus, the gushing sympathies of His overflowing soul, the unfeigned interest of His delighted being greet the widowed soul as the offering of its new Husband. It is hard for us to realize that God can derive any positive pleasure from us—and yet our faith must overcome this difficulty, where God's Word is so explicit. "To do good and to communicate forget not, for with such sacrifices God is *well pleased*." "Herein is love: not that we loved God, but that *He loved us*." "The Lord delighteth in thee—as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee." We might easily multiply the texts which declare God's renewed people to be a source of joy to the Divine mind, and which show, moreover, that the divine love for a sanctified soul is not a love of complacency, nor a philosophic love, nor a mere compassion, but a warm, emotional, intimate, confidential and reciprocal affection. Unless this were so, the figure and type of husband and wife for

Christ and His people, so explicitly presented in both Old and New Testaments, in prose as well as in poetry, would be unmeaning. Ruth, though a Moabitess, of whose nation it was said in the Hebrew law, "A Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord," did not become the slave, or the *protegee*, or the friend, but the beloved *wife* of Boaz. He took her to his heart and home, making her his equal in rank, and honoring her with his name and fortune. So Christ finds the sinner an alien, cursed by the law, a condemned castaway, but in His own rich fields of holy influences He moves and wins the sinner's heart, and raises him up (all trembling with the stupendous grace) to the enjoyment of His own rank and inheritance. "Joint-heir with Christ"—"shall sit with Me in My throne"—"I in them"—"that they may be one in us"—these are some of the expressions of union which are shadowed forth in the Old Testament, when God says to the believing soul: "Fear not, for thou shalt not be ashamed; neither be thou confounded, for thou shalt not be put to shame: for thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth, and shalt not remember the reproach of thy widowhood any more; for *thy Maker is thy Husband*." Precisely this intimate relation of the Christian heart to Christ is signified in the marriage of Ruth to Boaz, the pledges of an affection deep and permanent being received by the undeserving, but humbly-believing spirit. Now notice another fact in the Hebrew custom—the *children of the new marriage bore the name of the former husband*. Just so the good works which we produce through our union with Christ are ascribed to God—they are not human works, for man has no power to do good, but they are God's grace, manifest in our activity. God was the former husband, whom we abandoned by our sins, and who was thus to us virtually dead. In our widowhood—our sinful career—no product of holiness could exhibit itself from our unholy heart, but, when Christ marries us, we are sanctified, and

the works which are meet for repentance and faith are wrought by us in the name of our once abandoned God. Here is one of the many proofs of our Savior's Godhead. For who could be the second husband where God had been the first? Certainly none but God. The second and the first husband are the same. Christ and God are one. A like proof we may see by recurring to the avenger of blood. Who could destroy Satan? Certainly not Satan's victim. No human hand could prevail against sin. But sin is slain by Christ. Christ and God are one.

III. *The third work of the God, or redeemer, was to restore the lost inheritance.* The smitten family had gradually consumed their estate. The fair fields of their ancestry had passed out of their possession. They had become strange to their old domain, and wandered as homeless mendicants by the rich lands of their house. Such was Elimelech's family (or its feeble remnant) by the hills of Bethlehem. The mother sighing, "Call me not Naomi, call me Mara," and the daughter glenning after the reapers to procure the daily food, represent the two products of their loss—sadness and toil. From this humiliation they enter directly into repose and affluence. The old property is restored. The sorrow and the toil pass away together, and the cause of all this is Boaz, the lord of this fair country, who makes the beggar a prince when he makes the Moabitish gleaner a wife.

God never made man a sinner. Pure and holy as God Himself was he as he came from the hands of his Creator, and all the evil that has since defaced and defiled God's work is the result of man's going down into Moab—of his abandonment of the truth and service of God. The restoration of holiness to the sin-polluted heart must be a divine work. The penniless gleaner cannot purchase the lost estate. The rich lord only can do this. God's Spirit, rich in His gifts, must restore our soul. It is the sweet offer of Jesus to sanctify as to save, and the moment a sinner believes in Him, His Spirit enters the

heart as the earnest and beginning of the complete inheritance. The sinner is not saved as a sinner, but as a *saint*. Ruth, on her marriage, does not remain the poor gleaner, but enjoys a fortune commensurate with her position and dignity. As the soul is made *safe*, so it is made *holy* in Christ. Those who are in Christ Jesus, and thus are free from condemnation, are those who walk, not after the flesh, but after the spirit. And this holy walk is the free marriage gift of Christ—it is part of His great work of redemption. Holiness comes from no other source than *union with Christ*—it cannot come from contemplation, or penance, or human purchase, for the pauper has no element of wealth in himself; the inheritance must be bestowed through another's wealth. It is as I give myself to Christ that He sanctifies my soul; and this thought will increase my adoration of His mercy—my reciprocation of His love.

Thus, having seen how the typical redeemer married the widow and restored the lost inheritance, and how our spiritual Redeemer in like manner unites Himself, in the wonder of His love, to the sinner's soul and renews in him the love and practice of holiness; and having seen, too, that, in order to this, He must be God, let us, in another feature of the Jewish law, learn how He must be also *man*. The Hebrew *Goel*, or redeemer, was not any man, found at haphazard, but was especially designated in the statute—he was "the next of kin." He was of the same family, belonging within the sacred circle of kindred, acquainted with all the private, domestic history, and thus full of natural sympathy and co-operative interest in the advantage of the desolate household. Here we see the grand fact of the incarnation—the heroic achievement of Divine love, which assumed the dishonor of our nature in order to be identified with us. Though rich, He became poor; though equal with God, He took upon Him the form of a servant; He became sin who knew no sin, and so He can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, as He was in

all points tempted like as we are. And this thought begets the strong "therefore" of the apostle—"Let us, therefore, come boldly unto the throne of grace." How can we rightly appreciate our Savior's kinship? It is the most effective fact in the Gospel revelation. It destroys distance, and with it mystery and distrust. It makes religion palpable and eminently actual. It is the most quickening principle in the whole Christian life. But because of its amazing features—its incomprehensible condescension—we are too often practical unbelievers in this grand truth. To believe that our divine Redeemer is *God*, is easy; but to believe that He is *man*, demands a struggle; and yet this fact is the very marrow of the Gospel. We lean upon the God through the *man* Christ Jesus—our human nature is thus comforted while it is exalted.

My fellow-Christian, are you tempted to despondency, and are you compassed by cares? Does worldliness make great inroads upon your peace? Are you sighing in the gloom? Your comfort and revival will be found in the contemplation of your divine Redeemer; and while you recognize Him by faith as the God of glory who stoops to honor and sanctify you, you will also recognize His perfect manhood—One to whom you can confide every thought as to a sympathizing equal—to whom you can tell your coldness, your disappointments, your vagueness of soul, and feel in the commitment of your secret the sweets of an eternal friendship. It is to this plane God has, in His love, descended, when, as the man Christ Jesus, He woos your confidence and seeks your peace. Why, my brother, with such a refuge, should we be despondent? and why, with such a fire of holy love glowing at our side, should we be cold? We are *Christians*—Christ's own, Christ's beloved spouse; let us repeat over our name and be rebuked. We ought to be very joyful. The treasury is abundant, and within reach. The time for groaning and fainting with toil ought to be over. The

wife of Boaz is no more a weary gleaner. The Master's fullness belongs to her. We, then, best honor our divine Lord, when we accept and use His gifts; when we receive the cup of joy from His hands, and drink with thankful hearts. There is no reason why we should be subject to the cares and anxieties of this life, when the superabounding comforts and delights of the divine life are extended to us by the great act of redemption. It is well to remember that Ruth is a Moabitess, but it is better to remember that our heavenly Boaz says of each of us, "Ruth the Moabitess have I purchased to be my wife."

THE PEW SYSTEM, AND ITS TENDENCIES.

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A PREFATORY LETTER.

TO THE EDITOR:

I HAVE your note of the 18th inst. asking me for a sermon for your MONTHLY, and am glad to send you that which goes with this note, asking at the same time the privilege of accompanying it with a word or two by way of preface.

In August last there appeared in the HOMILETIC MONTHLY a sermon of mine, entitled "Our Brother's Blood," which dealt mainly with the danger of the growing alienation between different classes in our country, and which closed, incidentally, with a plea for a free chapel connected with my own work.

That chapel exists, I may add now, not to make any social distinction between classes in the community to which it ministers; for, as a matter of fact, its congregation includes all classes, and the work which it does among the poor, the neglected, and the untaught in that community, is done more largely by the members of my own congregation than by that worshiping in its chapel. In other words, the relations of these two congregations, both of them under my own rectorship, contribute, in my judgment, to efface those

social lines by which people in cities are likely to be too much divided, rather than to intensify them.

But it was not surprising that, after the publication of that sermon, I should have received such a letter as the following, which explains itself, viz.:-

"PHILADELPHIA, August 5, 1880.

"REV. AND DEAR SIR: In that most excellent sermon of yours, on 'Our Brother's Blood,' published in the HOMILETIC MONTHLY for August, and which fell under my eye to-day, I read many noble utterances, for which kindly accept a stranger's sincere thanks. But pardon, also, and just as kindly, an allusion to a paragraph toward the end of the discourse. You plead for a free chapel, 'reared through the large-hearted wisdom' of your 'venerable predecessor.'

"If I understand the facts, that chapel is for the poor. You then go on to say of our Savior: 'He reared no splendid sanctuaries'—for the rich to the exclusion of the poor? What else could you have intended to say? Now I submit that, if we are to 'imitate' Him, our churches, splendid or otherwise, should be open to all—rich and poor. Since you draw on France for illustrations, let there be a true Christian 'liberty, equality, and fraternity,' in every house of prayer. You see you were right in saying, in your excellent sermon, 'in days like these when almost all men read and think'

(Signed),

"Your friend,
"A BROTHER IN CHRIST."

At the time this letter reached me, its anonymous character prevented my expressing to my "brother in Christ" my entire concurrence with his views; but the accompanying sermon, preached to my own people in connection with the consecration of a free chapel, will indicate to him, and to others, not only that I entirely agree with him, but that I have said as much to those to whom I minister, in the most explicit terms. In other words, I recognize that the system of free chapels connected with our large churches in great cities is open to criticism and objection. But while this is so, it should be remembered that those who are working under this system *did not create it, and are at present powerless to change it.*

In churches where the pews are owned, and, as in some instances, held