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"IN HIS IMAGE"—A REVIEW.

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President of Union Theological Seminary in Virginia.

This volume contains the tenth annual series of the James Sprunt Lectures at Union Theological Seminary,—the series for the session of 1921-1922. There has been a succession of richly gifted lecturers on this foundation, including such men as Dr. Stalker, Sir William Ramsay, Dr. C. Alphonso Smith, Dr. G. Campbell Morgan and others, and their lectures have been listened to by large audiences and have then been welcomed in book form by many readers. But in no case have such great audiences gathered as those that greeted Mr. Bryan, and in no case has the appearance of the lectures in book form been awaited with keener interest. Here they are, clearly printed and strongly bound in a handy volume, a volume well adapted in its makeup to the great circulation which awaits it.

There are many grounds on which one can predict for it with confidence an immense sale. One is the unequalled personal popularity of the author, not only among those who agree with his political views but also among those who are and always have been of a different political faith. An interesting example of this is Dr. Francis E. Clark, founder and president of the United Society of Christian Endeavor, who, though a lifelong Republican, has recently published an appreciation of Mr.

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THE BOOK OF RUTH.

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Perhaps we little know how much of the value of life and the real pleasure of living is due to the presence of contrasts. In nature we are pleased and helped by the alternations of light and shade, the harmonious difference in colors of wood and field and sky and garden, the nearness of valley and towering mountain, of still meadows and flowing streams, of shelving beach and restless tides. In human nature the contrasts are no less marked, not alone in the difference of the sexes, but in many others that set each of us off from our fellows, assuring new angles of vision, individual aptitudes for special lines of work, individual ways of doing even the same thing. There are likenesses, of course, but there are marked differences that save us from monotony and make the world of people whom we meet and know a succession of interesting contrasts.

It certainly can be no mere accident that such contrasts are to be found within the pages of the Bible. Many, indeed, are present within the limits of even one book of Scripture, present because the contrast is to be found not in any trick of rhetoric (though the legitimate uses of rhetoric are not despised), but in the very succession of facts that tell and impress their story. This is peculiarly true of the Scriptures because from end to end there run within them two contrasting, antagonistic principles: sin and grace. Single out a few of the contrasts: God's perfect creation—and the entrance of sin. One faithful preacher of righteousness—and a world defiantly going deeper into wickedness. Judah the profligate—Joseph the pure. The self-depreciating and victorious Moses—the arrogant and defeated Pharaoh. The godly Samuel—the disloyal Saul. The

slender, unarmed David—the mail-clad, braggart Goliath. The righteous John—the ease-loving, sinning Herod. The chivalric Paul—the terrified Felix. The despised Nazarene—the proud but conquered Roman power.

Passing from the Book of Judges to the Book of Ruth we experience a vivid contrast. From the red front of war we pass to a peaceful harvest scene. From semi-idolatry we pass to sincere worship of the Most High. From the passions of rude men we pass to the purity of a home. From what is degrading and unspeakable we pass to what is noble and elevating. From nights of orgy and of blood we pass to the uplands lighted by His grace.

It is no unwilling admission to say for all of us that we are glad that such a book bears the name of a woman; for it is more than a wish—it is a wholesome expectation—to find what is best in the world associated with womanhood; and woe betide the nation or the age of which this ceases to be true. This is one of two books in the Bible bearing the name of a woman, and the name of each stands nobly forth. What simple womanliness, what gentle worth, what lasting influence for good, in the lives of Ruth and Esther!

The central scene of the book is to be found in the fields near Bethlehem, where later David was to live and work and shape his life for the larger, fuller life of years to come; the fields of Bethlehem, where one winter's night shepherds were abiding, keeping watch over their flocks, and angelic choirs filled the nearer heavens with—"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

The life-story of Ruth may soon be told. It is given in the shortest of the historical books of the Bible. Bethlehem meant "house of bread," but with all its fertility a famine, land wide in its scope, brought distress to at least one family within its borders, and this family, Elimelech and Naomi, and their sons Mahlon and Chilion, left Bethlehem and Palestine and struck across the Jordan to seek their living on the higher plateaus of Moab. There the father (Elimelech) died. Each of the sons married, Mahlon marrying Ruth (4:10) and Chilion marrying

Orpah, women of Moab. The sons both died, and thus the three women were left widows—all within a residence of ten years in Moab. Meanwhile the famine from which the family had fled had turned to abundance in Bethlehem and the bereaved Naomi made her plans to go back home again. The widows of her sons proposed to go with her, but she bade them return. One did return to her Moabite home—Orpah—but Ruth, in beautiful devotion, stayed with her and shared her fortunes. The two came to Bethlehem and created a stir in the town. “Is this Naomi?” they said. “Call me not Naomi,” she replied, “call me Mara, for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me.”

It was the plan of Naomi to provide Ruth with a husband, and it was a custom in Israel where a man died childless, and the widow wished to dispose of the estate, for the nearest of kin to redeem the land, if possible marry the widow and in case of issue have the first-born bear the name of the childless dead man. The man who performed this service was called the *goel*. Naomi thought that Boaz was her husband’s nearest kinsman. The barley harvest was just beginning. Ruth, by Naomi’s direction, continued to glean in the fields of Boaz. A kindly man, one, too, who recognized Ruth’s faithfulness to Naomi, he gave directions that she was to share the modest meal of the harvesters and to glean among the sheaves. Ruth won the love of Boaz, the yet nearer kinsman surrendered to Boaz his rights and duties of redemption and marriage, the two lovers became man and wife and the first child born of this happy union was Obed, father of Jesse, father of David; Boaz himself being a descendant of the Rahab (Matt. 1:5) who received the spies at Jericho and sent them out in peace.

I have somewhere run across this striking outline of the book:

- I. Ruth Choosing, chapter 1.
- II. Ruth Gleaning, chapter 2.
- III. Ruth Wooing, chapter 3.
- IV. Ruth Marrying, chapter 4.

The name of the writer of this book is found nowhere in the book itself; but in this it does not stand alone. A number of

the books of the Old Testament come to us bearing no names of authors. Jewish tradition assigned the writing to Samuel, and with great probability. I am not unmindful of the fact that certain critics confidently assign the production to post-exilic days. This is done on one of two grounds. The book by some is considered a protest against the legislation of Ezra and Nehemiah in the matter of foreign wives. By others it is thought that Ruth's declaration, "Thy people shall be my people and thy God my God," is another way of stating the truth that God is not the God of one people only, but of the world, but that this conception came in far down the history, and therefore the book must be late. This is an illustration of many of the arguments used by the destructive critics. They start out with the premise that Israel's religion was an evolution, not a revelation. Then they reject the biblical history that declares it was a revelation and not an evolution. Then they shape up the records as they think they ought to be by cutting out—or transferring to later times—what stands in the path of their theory and bending everything else, if necessary by forced interpretation, to conform to it. Apply the same methods to the history of Rome, or of England, or of America and you can prove that Nero was an amiable and a mild-mannered man, that Charles the Second was a saint and that Washington, Jefferson and Franklin never lived at all. The main reason for assigning the authorship of this book to post-exilic days is simply this: That the evolution of Israel's religion could not have reached the stage indicated in this book in pre-exilic days. But when we examine the book and its setting we shall probably be led to the conclusion that the Jewish tradition which assigns the writing to Samuel is correct. Samuel was a writer as well as a judge, a divinely appointed priest, a prophet and an educator. The language of the book is pure Hebrew (unmixed with the Aramaic of the days of Ezra and Nehemiah) and the book contains expressions that are common to the books of Samuel's time (Samuel and Kings) but not found elsewhere. The journey to Moab from Bethlehem, and the marriage between a Jew and a Moabitess, natural in a period when the nations were friendly, as we know they were in

the exile days of David (1 Sam. 22:3-4), would have been inexplicable after centuries of bitter war and hatred. It is true that some of the customs given in the book, as drawing off the shoe in confirming a bargain, are mentioned in the book as being ancient; but it is to be remembered that the events of the book took place certainly as long as fifty years before the birth of David, probably twice that long; and epochal changes in the life of the people had come to pass when the kingdom was established under Saul. The uncertainty as to the authorship affects not at all the value of the book. "The author's name (probably Samuel)," Thomas Fuller quaintly observes, "is concealed, neither is it needful it should be known; for, even as a man that hath a piece of gold that he knows to be weight, and sees it stamped with the king's image, careth not to know the name of that man who minted or coined it; so we, seeing this book to have the superscription of Caesar, the stamp of the Holy Spirit, need not to be curious to know who was the penman thereof." One other observation. Weigh it and you will see that the books of uncertain authorship in the Old Testament come to us with the same authority as those whose authorship is known. It is this: That they are one and all contained in the Old Testament which our Lord used and quoted and appealed to as the word of God. It might add a touch of interest were we able to ascertain just who was the author of this or that book of the Old Testament which gives no hint of authorship; but it would add nothing to its real value or authority. Christ stamped this collection as divine—and no merely human name could give it added authority.

Something should be said as to the purpose of the book of Ruth. It was written to give a charming picture of the domestic life of the times—to show that all was not dark even in such an age. It was written to show the descent of David, the greatest king who ever sat on a Jewish throne, and thus to trace through David the ancestry of David's greater Son, the promised and coming Messiah. Another purpose, possibly, as Lytton suggests, was "by the adoption of Ruth into the Jewish church to intimate the future ingathering of the Gentiles."

The literary character of the book is quite beyond praise. It has been called "this gentle pastoral," "this charming idyl." The book "consists of only eighty-five verses," says Cassell, "but these enclose a garden of roses as fragrant and full of calyxes as those which the modern traveler still finds blooming and twining about the solitary ruins of Israel and Moab, this side the Jordan and beyond. The significance and beauty of the brief narrative cannot be highly enough estimated, whether regard be had to the thought which fills it, the historical value which marks it, or the pure and charming form in which it is set forth."

In the Hebrew canon the book was the second of the five Megilloth, or Festal Rolls, each read at a festival or special anniversary. Ruth, as representing a harvest scene in the peaceful fields near Bethlehem, was read at Pentecost, the harvest festival. In our canon of the Old Testament (following the Septuagint and the Vulgate) the book is placed between Judges and I Samuel, and most appropriately, since it is a sequel (or at least a complement) to the one and an introduction to the other.

When we turn to consider the messages of the book of Ruth we shall find that they are neither few nor unimportant. I shall have to confine myself, because of limitation of space, to several lessons most clearly taught and of greatest value to us.

1. If the book of Judges reminds us of the surprising amount of sin in the world and the possible extent of it in any individual life, the book of Ruth teaches us the fact of *unexpected goodness in the world*. Both are facts; and both are facts to be kept equally in mind. There is a surprising amount of sin in this world; but, by the grace of God, there is also a surprising amount of goodness in the world. Had we only the book of Judges, with its harrowing succession of war and private crime, relieved, it is true, by the faith of a Gideon and the sweet, though half-superstitious, willingness of a freebooter's daughter to be made the victim of her father's vow, we might be led to think that nearly all was dark. The book of Ruth possesses large value to us in this: that it corrects any such view and bids us know that probably at the very time the Mid-

ianites were wasting the land and Gideon's bugles were sounding for the conflict; at a time when anarchy was prevailing and "every man did that which was right in his own eyes" and went unpunished for it save as private vengeance was meted out; near this very Bethlehem, stained by the unfaithfulness of the Levite's wife, there are peaceful fields, and the barley harvest goes merrily forward, and Boaz, kindly and genial, though mighty and wealthy, shares the simple life with his laborers and reveals his goodness to a faithful and devoted woman who has forsaken her own land and the gods of her fathers in order to cast in her lot with the followers of Jehovah. Noble characters here in Bethlehem, well worthy, from a human point of view, of the honor of standing as the forbears of the illustrious King David. Nor is this the only instance of surprising goodness over against surprising sin. Do you recall the record of the return of Abraham from the slaughter of the kings and his welcome at the gates of Jerusalem? Melchizedek met him, King of Salem and Priest of God Most High—at a time when we might have thought Abraham himself to be the one representative of true religion in the earth. Do you recall the despair of Elijah, victor over the hosts of Baal, yet despondent and asking death in the wilderness below Beersheba, going still further from the place of duty and making his home in a cave in the awful desolation of Mt. Sinai?—"I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts; because the children of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant, thrown down Thine altars, and slain Thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life to take it away." Not so: "Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal and every mouth which hath not kissed him." "I, even I only, am left?" There is Elisha the son of Shaphat, whose work, succeeding yours, will be successful and constructive. Do we turn to New Testament times and look upon the dry ground out of which sprang the shoot of Jesse? Do we think of the career of Herod the Great or the only less bloody reign of Archelaus his son and successor? In that time were living also the godly Anna and the saintly Simeon; and over the slopes

of Olivet stood the home of Martha and Mary and Lazarus, to become in a generation the Saviour's home whenever he should come to Jerusalem; and far off in Asia Minor Lois and Eunice were living, building up a sweet home life in the atmosphere of which the gentle Timothy was to receive his training in the holy Scriptures; and all through Palestine and wherever the Jews had gone there lived many who sincerely worshipped God, were looking for the promise of the Messiah, were maintaining, in the midst of sin, a wholesome life individually and in the home. Does some catastrophe shake the world? How quickly are the fountains of sacrifice and beneficence opened up in the souls of those who hitherto have shown only the seamy side of character to their fellows! Does sorrow invade the home and death lay its icy fingers on some sweet child, the sunshine of it? At such a time you have seen a hardened man give way to agony and tears and thus prove that some chords are there that still may be swept by noble feelings and "make one music as before." No one can dispute the fact that in any individual life the lengths to which sin may go are fearful to contemplate, all of which means that no man is as bad as he can grow to be. But turn that fact around and it means that in very worst life that you can have in mind today almost certainly there is something that is good; some impulse that may be turned into a better channel; some appeal for better things that may be made; some affection the light of which has not entirely gone out; some part of the image and likeness of God yet remaining in the human soul. "Despairing of no man," says Christ.

Some good is there, let it be added, because God's Spirit is there in some portion of His almighty power. It is thus not the good that any man has built up by his own exertions; certainly not any measure of good that can commend him to God and thus bring him to salvation or bring salvation to him. While due credit is to be given to any man for the use of gifts and opportunities, yet we should recognize that it is still the Spirit of God suggesting, restraining, empowering, that preserves or builds up the goodness that surprises us in our human kind.

It is so easy to become a pessimist. I have read somewhere recently of the discovery of one of the most ancient of all manuscripts. True to human nature the writer of it harked back to the ancient days before him and bewailed the degeneracy of his own. So many people are fond of thinking and saying that "the former times are better than these," when in point of fact they were not so good by far. "If you are pessimistic read history" that has passed into a proverb. We have, it is sadly true, great evils among us, but compare our age with any of the ages preceding, or our generation with any of the generations preceding—I do not mean a slim cross section of it—and it will be shown that we live in the best time the world has ever known. There is more of real religion today, more of missionary enterprise, more of Christian philanthropy, more of true brotherhood, more conscience, more temperance, better laws and cleaner public service than the world has ever known.

If you are pessimistic look not only backward but outward, and you will find an amount of goodness that will surprise you. It is the ships that go down, not those that come into port, that fill the columns of the daily papers. It is the one criminal, not the nine law-abiding men, that takes up the time of the court. In the wide constituency of the Christian church today many a quiet, unassuming Christian man, perhaps your neighbor, yet unknown to you, is making daily sacrifices, enduring keen disappointments, bearing uncomplaining burdens, all for the sake of Him who pointed first the way. On many a farm, in many a hamlet and town, yes (though many know it not) in many a crowded city of our land there are quiet, Christian homes today guided by the gentle hand of the Master and speaking forth His praise. When you think of embezzlements, and bribery, and murders, and war, and municipal and Congressional investigations, and a whole host of moral and political disorders, think also of these peaceful fields and the harvest scenes near Bethlehem.

If you are pessimistic look not only backward and outward but also forward. It is practically certain that in a generation the world will be better still. We have great evils, but they are

being studied as never before, laws are being framed and many are being enforced, and with an awakening public conscience it may safely be predicted that evils now tolerated, or tolerated in some sections, will within a few generations be looked upon as remnants of barbarism allowed to linger to these days. We have not measured up, by far, to what as Christians (and as a church) we should have been and done, but we are making serious efforts to correct our mistakes and profit by our blunders. We have many things to mourn over if we are true Christians, in our individual life and in the witness and work of the Kingdom, but we have faces to the east and are striving under the leadership of God to make this world a better world and bring it back to an allegiance to Him. We have not used as we should have used the resources of righteousness, but certainly we misinterpret the temper of our times if we do not recognize that there is abroad today the resolve to convert these into forces for righteousness throughout the earth.

In brief, what we need to do is to look not at one group of facts, but, so far as may be, at all the facts. We are to balance the darkness and the task of heathendom by the devotion and life and labor of an increasing number of workers who are sowing, under God, for immense harvests. We are to balance the skepticism that marks many of our state schools of higher learning by the earnest study of God's word on the part of a host of students in these and other institutions. We are to balance the many tendencies and forces of evil by the many forces that are winning the fight for the truth. To see only the blacker facts of life is to take a leap into pessimism. To see only what is bright and beautiful, ignoring all else, is to build upon false hopes. But it may confidently be submitted that to consider all the range of facts, the bad as well as the good, the good as well as the bad, will make one an optimist, yet a sane and serious optimist, conscious that the world is steadily growing better but equally certain that there must be determined, well-planned work under the guidance of God's word and Spirit to bring it to the best.

2. The book of Ruth presents to us a fine illustration of the

overruling providence of God. It reminds us in this respect of the life of Joseph. Sold into slavery by his brothers, though protesting and pleading with tears, imprisoned unjustly, his release delayed because of the ingratitude of a high officer of the court—what strange disposal of his life by Him whom he served! And as for Jacob, it was only human that he should burst out with the exclamation, in remembrance of the loss of Joseph and the imprisonment of Simeon and in the presence of the demand made for Benjamin, the youngest of all: “all these things are against me.” But all, under God, were working together for him and for his seed after him. Joseph’s summary of it at the end was this: “Now therefore be not grieved nor angry with yourselves that ye sold me hither; for God did send me before you to preserve life. . . . But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.” (Gen. 45:5 and 50:20). In this story of Ruth observe a succession of strange providences. Famine drove this family from the land and made them exiles in another. Death removed the head of the home and then the strong young sons, leaving three widows to mourn their loss. Again, it seemed quite human that Naomi should say: “the hand of the Lord is gone out against me” and when she was welcomed back to her own home to declare: “Call me not Naomi”—“pleasantness”—“call me Mara”—“bitter”—“for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty. Why then call ye me Naomi, seeing the Lord hath testified against me and the Almighty hath afflicted me?” Human? yes, but, like Jacob, little knowing what the future had in store; little thinking that these misfortunes were blessings in disguise; little dreaming that these very afflictions were links in a golden chain which God Himself was forging; little imagining that these strange and baffling providences, afflictions when taken singly, were *working together* to bring glorious things to pass in the long, long years of the kingdom of God. This famine in Bethlehem led to residence in Moab; this residence in Moab led to the marriage of a Jew and a Moabitess; the death of all three men,

accomplishing what very possibly the death of one or even of two would not have done, led to Naomi's return to Bethlehem, Ruth with her; this return led to the union of Boaz and Ruth; and this union, thus strangely brought about, resulted in two generations in the birth of David, the best and greatest of the Hebrew kings; the man whose life, with its great virtues and acknowledged faults, has proved an inspiration to a multitude of lives; the sweet psalmist whose hymns of hearty confession and wholesome trust have molded the prayers and shaped the praises of the worshippers of every generation succeeding his. Nor does even this sum up the blessings that have flowed—are flowing—are yet to flow from the issue of these strange transactions in those eastern lands in days long gone. From this dynasty of David appeared in the fullness of time his greater Son, the ideal David, to whom should be the gathering of the people, though through the gateway of his death, the Prince of the Kings of the Earth, the Mighty Savior, the Everlasting God, the Prince of Peace, the one but sufficient Hope of the sinful sons of men. Suppose Naomi had been able to see that through her agency, humanly speaking, these things could be, think you that she would have said: "the hand of the Lord is gone out against me?" No, but rather this: "Here am I, Lord; send me!"

There is hardly in all Scripture a more comforting teaching than that of the overruling providence of God. Trench spoke only the truth when he said: "Thou canst not to thy place by accident. It is the very place God meant for thee." That much at least we may confidently count upon and know. The time in which we were born; the country in which we first saw light; the home that sheltered our early years; the native gifts implanted in us; the facilities for training and development; the open doors of opportunity; all are the orderings of the Most High that will lead out to blessed results, for us and others, if by and through these things we follow the leading of Him who made them possible for us. And then, as here with Naomi and Ruth, the reverses, the afflictions, the sorrows that go deeply down, are His orderings also and if rightly used will issue in purer character and more blessed influence and for the endless future

an exceeding weight of glory. "Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby."

"Oh, blows that smite, Oh hurts that pierce
This shrinking heart of mine,
What are ye but the Master's tools
Forming a work divine?"

"Who has not known ill-fortune never knew himself or his own virtues," says Mallet. You know the Arab proverb: "All sunshine makes the desert." There is, undoubtedly, "the gain of the dark room." The stricken home brings us not alone to serious thinking: it opens up wells of sympathy that else were sealed, and if its afflicted ones respond it will make of them the comforters of others. The patient and sweet invalid has preached effective sermons from her chair or cot. The strong man bearing cheerfully some disappointment and making the most of it has been an inspiration to a whole community. How selfish this world would be were there no sufferings to enrich it: "Chastening," says one, "widens the experience, deepens sympathy, enlarges the range of friendship, invigorates character, throws the soul back upon God in firmer trust and does a work for the soul so noble that, if its own character alone be regarded, the divine love behind it and pervading it becomes evident." "The earth," says one trenchant writer, "gets as much blessing out of a black cloud as from the bright sun; so should we."

Thus the value to us and to others of misfortune or affliction when one is "exercised thereby;" all steps in the orderings of God. "All steps in the ordering of God." That is the secret. Misfortunes in themselves are misfortunes only. It is only when they are forged into links in the purposes of God that they turn to blessings. Placed with Him, they will be thus ordered and work together for wise and beneficent ends, not in a day, perhaps; possibly not in our own life time, but in the end and at the time that God Himself has chosen. Let me appeal to your own experience in proof of this statement. Trace the

course of your life, in rapid review, from your earliest childhood until this good hour. Try to recall the steps that have led you into the richest experiences of your life, and I think you will see that many of those steps were counted at the time of your own or another's affliction or misfortune. Swift change of plans, disappointment, adversity, death itself, strangely opened door after door and brought wondrous things to pass. I could detail for you a case that came under my own observation: an affliction changing plans carefully made and bringing disappointment; yet the result of it, in a chain of providences, has been the building of happy homes and the blessing of many lives; and as yet we see only a small segment of a widening circle. Sometimes it is allowed us to see some part of the working out of these providences. Sometimes the process lies hidden for the unfolding of future days. But of this we may be sure: That the everlasting God who overruled the heartless sale and the unjust imprisonment of Joseph and made them steps to high position and wide service and the training of his people and their later triumph under Him; the God who overruled famine and death and bitter disappointment in the family of Naomi and made them steps in bringing David to the throne of Israel and David's greater Son to the throne of universal empire; will overrule today, in our personal lives, disaster, sorrow, pain and loss, and make them just so many steps in blessing to ourselves and others in His wide and everlasting kingdom if we but do His will: "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him; and He will bring it to pass."

"Blindfolded and alone I stand,
With unknown thresholds on each hand;
The darkness deepens as I grope.
Afraid to fear, afraid to hope;
Yet this one thing I learn to know
Each day more surely as I go,
That doors are opened, ways are made,
Burdens are lifted, or are laid
By some great law unseen and still,
Unfathomed purpose to fulfill
Not as I will."—Helen Hunt.

"Be the day short, or seem so long,
At length it ringeth its even-song."—Heywood.

And thus

"Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see
The distant scene; one step enough for me."

3. We may see in this story of Ruth *the reward of faithfulness*. I spoke of contrasts. There is a striking contrast here which we should by no means miss in the study of this book. There were two daughters in law. "Orpah kissed her mother in law; but Ruth clave unto her." "Orpah kissed her mother in law" . . . and then returned to her own people and her heathen gods. "You have seen," says Beecher, "a ship out on the bay, swinging with the tide and seeming as if it would follow it; and yet it cannot, for down beneath the water it is anchored. So many a soul sways towards heaven, but cannot ascend thither, because it is anchored to some secret sin." But Ruth "clave unto her," and in words that have graven themselves deep into the heart: "Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee; for whither thou goest I will go; and where thou lodgest I will lodge; thy people shall be my people; and thy God my God; where thou diest will I die, and there will I be buried; the Lord do so to me and more also if aught but death part thee and me." "Her vow," says Cox, "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." We should not, however, fail to notice that there is revealed in these words a faithfulness not only to Naomi but also to the God Naomi served. It was Ruth's choice of the true religion also as over against the false religion of her

people. Contrast the later life of the two. Orpah, we can well imagine, returned to her home and served the gods of Moab, lost the opportunity of uniting herself and her descendants with the chosen people and sharing their privileges, re-aligned herself with the race that gave itself to a career of opposition to the chosen people and won for itself the contempt of the prophets and the hopeless subjugation under the strong hand of Babylon. Ruth, by her choice, separated herself from the idolatry of her people, united herself to Jehovah and His worshippers, paved the way for a happy marriage and her place as the ancestress of kings and of the King of Kings, the world's one Savior. There was with her no ulterior purpose in all this: nothing here but simple faithfulness to one who had grown dear to her and to the true God whom she served; but God blessed it in great rewards that have not ceased through all the ages.

You have read of Phidias carving his figures that were marvels of the art. One day an admirer saw him working as carefully and industriously on the back of the head as if it were the face that all could behold and protested that he could save his time, for who will see? "The gods will see it," was the quick response.

There is no substitute on earth for simple faithfulness: in the home, in the sphere of business, in the work of the church, in the propagation of the truth throughout the earth, nothing else can take its place. And the rewards that crown it are certain and many and distinctive. The giving that blesses him who gives and him who takes; the discipline of character; the unconscious fitting for higher posts; the multiplying of opportunities for usefulness, and not least, the approval of conscience and the consciousness of the favor of God mark the course of the faithful man. And "be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee the crown of life." We can set no limit to the blessings that will flow to and from the Christian who is found faithful.

4. I have time only to mention one other teaching from this life story of Ruth as unfolded in the pages of the book that bears her name. It has been phrased as "*the sovereignty and mystery of divine grace.*" While to Israel pertained "the adop-

tion, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises," and the fathers and the human line of Christ, yet God did not confine Himself merely to Israelites in choosing those from whom the Christ should spring; nor, let it be noted, merely to those of unsullied lives. In the genealogy of Christ as given by Matthew in the first chapter of his gospel the names of four women are given: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba. Three of the four were women of scarlet life: Tamar, Rahab, Bathsheba. Two of the four at least were outsiders: Rahab, who hid the spies at Jericho, and who became the ancestress of Boaz; and Ruth, the Moabitess, who marrying Boaz became the ancestress of David and of Christ. On the one side we have further illustration of the providence of God so overruling even the sins for which those who committed them are responsible that His purposes of grace are not hindered but the rather brought to pass. On the other side we see His principle of selecting whatever means He chooses in order that these purposes may be accomplished. On a vastly larger scale this is true of His dealing with Israel; for in His sovereign purpose the Jews, who have hardened their hearts and blinded their minds, are set aside for a season and the despised Gentiles are the bearers of the good tidings of great joy to the ends of the earth. What a rebuke to the exclusiveness of the Jews! What a rebuke to the exclusiveness in the present day! What a challenge to us to recognize the work of God wherever carried forward in His name and bid it godspeed, even though it be not strictly according to our own methods! We may justly rejoice that as a church we recognize and welcome and aid such work. God speed the day when all the churches of Christ the world over shall each rejoice in the work of every other that labors sincerely for the King!