

- 3 -

## THE WIDOW AND THE KNIGHT TEMPLAR

There is no more beautiful picture of quiet home life in all literature than this pastoral ballad, this inimitable love lyric of the Book of Ruth. Its very simplicity constitutes its grandeur. Every incident is depicted with vivid realism; some portions are surcharged with intense pathos; here we become familiar with the quaint manners and customs of a bygone age. Here we learn of woman's devotion, and of man's honor and trustworthiness.

The characters of Boaz and Ruth stand out against the background of the world's history with startling vividness. The farmer of Bethlehem towers a prince among men, pure and chaste as a woman, his loyalty to honor and rectitude are unsurpassed. The very name of the little Moabitish widow has become synonymous with beauty and purity.

In the days when the Judges ruled Israel, the land of Palestine was laid waste by famine. Elimelech of Bethlehem took his wife, Naomi, and his 2 sons, Chilion and Mahlon, and went out into the land of Moab seeking sustenance. The sons married women of that land, and these daughters of Moab were true and faithful - hear the words which the aged Naomi spoke to them as they stood at the parting of the way. For, after the lapse of 10 years, Elimelech and his 2 sons had died, and Naomi, being bereft of husband and sons, and having heard that God had visited His people in giving them bread, arose to return to her own land. Her 2 daughters-in-law, having loved these young Euphrathites, these strangers from a strange land, they loved their memory still, and tenderly cherished the woman who had given them birth; so they both arose to go with her into the land of Judah. But the elder woman entreated them, "Go, return each to her mother's house; the Lord deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead and with me." Happy is the woman who has such an encomium pronounced upon her by the mother of her dead husband. No higher proof could be given of duty well done. They lifted up their voices and wept, after being again entreated Orpah kissed her mother-in-law and turned back to her own land and her own people, and we never hear of her again. But Ruth's affection rose to the sublime height of renunciation. "Entreat 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, . . . ." her confidence strengthens with her confession, and she lays firm hold on Jehovah, the God of Israel, and by faith she becomes a true daughter of Abraham and boldly takes the old Jewish oath - "the Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me."

Who could renounce such devotion, such abandon of love - not the bereaved and lonely Naomi. So they 2 went until they came to Bethlehem. And all the city was moved about them, and they said: "Is this Naomi?" And she said, "Call me not Naomi, or Pleasant, but call me Mara, or Bitter, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, but the Lord hath brought me home again empty." The bearing of children was much coveted under the Old Testament dispensation, when women might hope that from some child of theirs, the Saviour of the world would some day spring. Hence Naomi felt trebly afflicted when her entire posterity was cut off.

The younger woman also had suffered; from her own people she could hope for nothing. No promise had been given them; divine revelation came through the Hebrews; and from her youthful husband she had heard of God's dealings with His chosen people. Who knows, but as she listened to the wonderful story of the promised Messiah, hope sang a low, sweet song in her own heart; at any rate she had learned through association to love the God of Israel, and when her husband was taken from her, she clung to his mother with filial devotion and Naomi loved her with all a mother's tenderness.

They reached Bethlehem in the beginning of barley harvest, and Ruth gleaned barley after the reapers in the fields of Boaz. As Boaz looked over the field of busy workers, his quick eye detected the stranger, and in answer to his inquiry he was told the story of Ruth. Then Boaz said to her, "Go not to glean in another field, neither go from hence; but abide here fast by my maidens, and when thou art athirst go unto the vessels and drink." When the young girl expressed surprise at his kindness to a stranger he answered, "It hath fully been shewed me, all that thou hast done unto thy mother-in-law since the death of thine husband: and how thou hast left thy father and thy mother, and the land of thy nativity, and art come unto a people which thou knewest not heretofore. The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of



Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust." He invited her to partake of their noonday meal; and she sat beside the reapers, and Boaz himself waited upon her at the table.

When night came she took up her gleanings and went into the city unto her mother-in-law. She told Naomi all the experience that had befallen her during the day, and said, "the man's name for whom I wrought was Boaz." Then her mother-in-law answered, "The man is of near kin unto us, one of our next kinsman." By this statement she hoped to awaken Ruth's interest in the man, for according to the Jewish law, when a man died and left no child, his next of kin should redeem his land, marry his widow and raise up children unto his kinsman, that his name be not cut off from among his people.

When the harvest was ended and it was known that Boaz would be winnowing barley that night in his threshing floor, Naomi (being well versed in all the Jewish customs) instructed Ruth in all that she should do and sent her down to the threshing floor. The younger woman answered, "All that thou sayest unto me, I will do." So she washed and anointed herself and put on her raiment and went.

When Boaz had eaten and drunk, and laid down to sleep at the end of the heap of corn, she crept into the room, and laid down softly at his feet. Was she afraid? No! Possibly she had experienced fear and apprehension as she traveled the road alone, but now that she had reached the threshing floor, she knew herself to be in the presence of one who would protect her from all danger. Trust any woman within whose heart the Spirit of God dwells, to know on whom she can depend.

Remember Ruth was no novice, her experience had given her wisdom; this was no convent reared girl, ignorant of life and its mysteries. She had talked with Boaz, had eaten with him, had looked into his face and possibly had traced there some resemblance to the one she had loved and lost. She had read the man's soul by the light of her own heart's purity, and the word she found written there was "honor".

About midnight the man awoke, and he was afraid, startled to find a woman lying at his feet, and he demanded sharply, "Who art thou?" She answered quietly, "I am Ruth thine handmaid: spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid; for thou art a near kinsman."

Then it was the true nobility of the man's character was display. Oh, my brothers,



Boaz was a Templar! He may never have sworn on bended knee in the presence of the knights in solemn conclave, that "he would wield his sword in defense of innocent maidens, destitute widows, and helpless orphans" but no truer knight ever "leveled lance or led a charge." And the banner over him, though invisible, had inscribed on its fold, "In Hoc Signo Vincas" and the same sign was engraved upon the man's soul. To the young widow of Mahlon, he answered, "Blessed be thou of the Lord, my daughter, for thou hast shown more kindness in the latter end than at the beginning, inasmuch as thou followest not young men, whether poor or rich." As much as to say, "It was very gracious of you, Ruth, when you accepted the hand of Mahlon, it is even more righteous of you to prove your willingness to accept his middle-aged kinsman and thus fulfill the law of Jehovah."

This "spreading of the skirt" was just as sacred as when your father and mine placed the ring upon our mother's hand and plighted the solemn troth. And God Himself honors the custom by making use of it to illustrate the tie between Himself and His people. Hear Him saying to Jerusalem His chosen: "I looked upon thee, and I spread my skirt over thee; yea, I swear unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, and thou becamest mine."

So this mighty man of wealth, this Prince of the House of Elimelech, swore unto the little Moabitish widow and entered into covenant with her saying, "There is a nearer kinsman than I, but if he will not redeem thy husband's lands and take thee to wife, then will I do the part of a kinsman to thee, as the Lord liveth."

Then she lay down and slept as soundly and as safely as if she had been under her own father's roof. But with the true spirit of knighthood which would protect the woman he loved even from the shadow of suspicion, Boaz awoke her before it was light and giving her a generous present of barley (a present, in that lately famine-stricken land, more precious than gold) sent her away unto her mother-in-law.

Then he called together the elders of the city and the kinsman of whom he had spoken, and said unto the kinsman in the presence of the elders: "Naomi has come out of the country of Moab and selleth a parcel of land that was our brother Elimelech's, if thou wilt redeem the land, redeem it; if not tell me, for there is none to redeem it besides



thee, and I after thee." The kinsman said, "I will redeem it." Then said Boaz, "What day thou buyest the field of the hand of Naomi, thou must buy it also of Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of the dead, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance." Now the Jewish historian tells us that the near kinsman, having a wife and children of his own, had to waive his right in favor of Boaz. So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife, and in course of time the Lord gave them a son. Then the woman said to Naomi, "Blessed be the Lord, which hath not left thee this day without a kinsman that his name may be famous in Israel, for thy daughter-in-law, which loveth thee, and is better to thee than 7 sons, hath born him."

Thus we see, that though Ruth was of another race and nation, yet for her constancy and trust in Jehovah, she was exalted to the high station of Ancestress to King David and to "Great David's Greater Son" - the Messiah.

My sisters, may the fidelity of this heroine of our Order, to the petty cares and trials of every day life give us a more exalted conception of our daily household duties. May our loyalty to God and our loved ones be as firm as hers.

My brothers, may you at all times prove as worthy of trust as was Boaz. May your lives be such that God will delight to honor you, ever remembering His own statement, "Them that honor Me I will honor."

May the Lord "spread His skirt" over us all, may He cover us with the mantle of His love, and may membership in this Order mean honor and integrity in manhood, beauty and purity in woman.