

GLEANING AFTER THE REAPERS.

"Let her glean even among the sheaves, and reproach her not." Ruth 2:15.

Old Death had dealt a cruel blow to Naomi and Ruth. A famine had driven Elimelech and Naomi into a strange land. Then death had struck Elimelech down in the very prime of life. But young love does not stop for famine, war or death. Naomi's two sons found women in Moab that they loved. Then when they had barely tasted the sweetest of life both were struck down. In those days plagues frequently killed the young and beautiful as well as the old and wrinkled. It was only natural that Naomi would want to go back to her people in her bitter bereavement. She had nothings to give to her two daughters in law. She commended them to their own people and hoped they would find homes for themselves in Moab. She kissed them and told them good by. But Ruth would not leave her.

In all literature there is not a more beautiful story of friendship than the story of Naomi and Ruth. There is hardly a more strained relationship in life than that of mother in law and daughter in law. Two women are in love with the same man and must share him between them. The mother knows the boy's happiness is bound up in the younger woman. If she is sensible, she knows that he must love his wife dearly if they are to be happy. But the selfishness in her heart cries out against it. How many otherwise happy lives have been wrecked because a mother thinks no other woman can take her place.

The untimely death of the son and husband may have drawn the two women more closely together. But a sorrow like that could not have knit two hearts together in such a binding friendship if both women had not been far above the average in nobility of character.

The influence of Naomi's religion cannot be left out of this story. Ruth was born in Moab and brought up under the bloody licentious worship of Baal. It did not take a sensible girl long to see the advantages to a woman under Jenovan's wings. Part of her love for Naomi sprang from deep gratitude for leading her into a better way.

"And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following 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."

It is one of the most beautiful declarations of love and fidelity in all h^uman speech. It gushed right out of the goodness of a young girl's heart. It was not just empty words. She lived this beautiful vow to the end.

They reached Bethlehem in the middle of the barley harvest. As they had no food the only hope of living was to glean after the reapers under the blazing harvest sun. It was work the older woman could not do. Ruth gladly gleaned for them both. She was not seeking romance. She was trying in the only way open to her to gather food for herself and the woman she loved. She found Boaz's field by accident.

When Boaz saw this beautiful young woman among the reapers the change of scenery was not displeasing. A beautiful young woman adds to almost any scene.

"In Scarlet towne where I was borne
There was a fair maid dwellin'
Made every youth cry Well-a-way.
Her name was Barbara Allen."

"A rag and a bone and a hank of hair" call loudly to a man, especially if she has ruby lips, dimples in her cheeks, curls on her temples or laughing roguish eyes. But Boaz was a sensible man. He knew that the most enduring female charms come from the heart. How many men fall in love with a beautiful face or a graceful form without taking time to find if the deeper and more enduring qualities are there too. That Boaz had taken note of the woman's finer self is shown by his own words:

"If hath fully been shewed me, all that thou hast done unto thy mother in law since the death of thine husband: and now 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."

"Be good, sweet maid, and let who can be clever:
Do lovely things, not dream them, all day long:
And so make Life, Death, and that vast forever
One grand sweet song." Charles Kingsley.

It was the noble things that Ruth did, and not mere physical beauty, that made her the queen she was. It was the kindness she showed her mother in law that won her so many

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friends in a strange land. The women of Bethlehem said she was "better than seven sons". That was high praise for a woman in any day, but it meant far more than.

Boaz's tender care for the safety of this friendless young woman is a bright chapter on the brutal pages of his time. It shows the softening and refining influences of the religion of Jehovah. Every man is a Knight or a wolf. His response to a beautiful young woman shows which he is. If he is a Knight, he takes off his hat. If he is a wolf, he whistles.

One of O. Henry's characters is called Piggy. His business was to steal the virtue of underpaid shop girls. Piggy could look at a woman and tell if she was hungry. The author suggests that the name was a slander on swine. Ruth was friendless, helpless and hungry. But Boaz would not take advantage of her poverty to exploit her. How many men in our enlightened age could have been trusted so far?

"My daughter, shall I not seek rest for thee, that it may be well with thee?" Naomi wanted to do something fine for the girl she loved. She wanted to get her a home where she would be loved and honored as queen. But it is not hard to see that she had a zest for the game. A woman never gets too old to go on a man hunt if she has a beautiful young woman for bait.

Boaz was already in love with Ruth. But he had such an advantage over her and she was so young. She might want a younger man than he. It would be hard for her to refuse him if he asked her to marry him. He was such a refined gentleman he had to be nudged a little to get him to propose. Naomi knew how to do the nudging.

Customs and fashions change in love as in manners and clothes. But a woman's weapons are the same in all ages and in all classes of society.

"For the Colonel's Lady and Judy O'Grady
Are sisters under their skins."

To win the man she wants the woman makes herself just as attractive and irresistible as she can. With the aid of dress, jewels and perfume, says, "Here I am." And woe to the fiddle-footed bachelor who tries to get away. He hardly ever makes it..