

the duty, according to the existing custom, to marry the widow.* The widow was also to spit out before him, which, among the Orientals, was an expression of extreme detestation or contempt; and is even now so among the Arabians of the present day, and that not only among the common people, but also among the better classes. It may not be out of place to remark here too, that whilst the rendering in the English version "and spit in his face" is certainly quite admissible, yet it is by no means necessary, as "and spit out before him" would afford just as correct a rendering, as every Hebrew scholar will admit. Indeed the Hebrew word בִּפְנָיו (*Bephanav*), "in his face," is over and over again rendered in our version by "before him." This arises from the idiom that in Hebrew *in his presence*, or *before him*, can only be expressed by "*in his face*."

But all this merely shews, that under certain circumstances it was regarded in those days of such great importance for a man to marry his childless brother's widow that an exception to the general rule forbidding such a marriage was deemed very desirable, but still leaves the main problem unsolved, why a woman should be allowed to marry her deceased sister's husband, whilst a man is strictly forbidden to marry his deceased brother's wife.

That this difficult subject should have awakened a good deal of discussion might well be imagined, and that from the nature of the question various theories should have been advanced and different conclusions arrived at is no more than might naturally be expected. It is, therefore, but reasonable if we would avoid forming a one-sided opinion, that all that can be said either for or against should be carefully considered.

* Compare Gen. xxxviii. Ruth iv.