

Ruth and Naomi.

SEPTEMBER 9.

RUTH I: 14-22.

Golden Text Ruth 1: 16.

THE Book of Ruth is supposed to have been written by Samuel during the reign of David. It affords a beautiful glimpse of domestic life, shewing that true religion was not extinct even in the darkest days of the Israelitish apostasy. A more charming picture of genuine piety, and fine feeling it is impossible to conceive. It is probable that Ruth lived in the time of Gideon. The local interest of the narrative centres in Bethlehem, six miles south from Jerusalem, originally called Ephrath, Gen. 35: 19—where Rachel died; of which David was a native, and where Jesus Christ was born, see Micah 5: 2. In this quiet neighbourhood lived Elimelech with his wife Naomi and their two sons, Mahlon and Chilian. A famine having occurred, the family became embarrassed, had to mortgage their property, ch. 4: 3, 4, and moved away into the land of Moab on the eastern side of Jordan, where food and employment could be more easily obtained. They had not been long there when Elimelech died and Naomi was left a widow. The two sons married Moabitish women, called Orpah and Ruth. At the end of ten years both died and the three widows were plunged into the deepest distress and sorrow. What should they do? Learning that the famine had ceased in her native country, Naomi resolves to return to Bethlehem in the hope of finding friends there to sympathize with her. She loved her daughters-in-law dearly. In order to test the sincerity of their love to her, as well as to free herself from the responsibility of the consequences should they go with her to share her poverty, she argues the matter with them. With touching pathos she refers to their kindness to her sons, their husbands, while they were alive, and to the mutual affection that had existed betwixt herself and them. She then urged upon them to go back to their friends who were well off and would provide amply for them. Orpah went back, but nothing would induce Ruth to leave Naomi. Orpah, like the young man in the parable, Matt. 19: 22, was not prepared to make such a sacrifice. Ruth's devotion, on the other hand, was just such as Christ demands from all his faithful followers, Matt. 10: 37; 19: 29. V. 19. The news of Naomi's return soon spread and many of her old friends clustered round her, but, so changed by grief! they scarcely knew her. Vs. 20, 21. Of their own accord she and her husband had gone away, but God by his judgments had brought her back. V. 22. According to Hebrew law it was the privilege of the poor and the stranger to follow the reapers and gather up the gleanings. Lev. 19: 9; 23: 22. Ruth was providentially led to the harvest field of Boaz, a rich nobleman, who afterwards married her, so she became the ancestor of the royal house of David, ch. 4: 22; Matt. 1: 5, 6, which gave Jesus to the world. Naomi acted wisely in leaving idolatrous Moab, and Ruth in choosing her excellent company. Those who follow Christ will in the end be the gainers, John 10: 21, 28.

A Praying Mother.

SEPTEMBER 10.

1 SAMUEL I: 21-28.

Golden Text, 1 Samuel 1: 28.

THE greater part of 1 Samuel may have been written by the eminent man whose name it bears, but the evidence is not conclusive. In it we find the history of the children of Israel from the time of Samuel's birth till the death of Saul. At this time Eli was both high-priest and judge in Israel, ch. 1: 9; 4: 18. He lived at Shiloh, taking care of the tabernacle, assisted by his two sons Hophni and Phinehas. At Ramah, a few miles to the south-west, there lived a pious couple, Elkanah and Hannah. The man was wealthy and liberal. He was regular in the duties of religion, and a kind husband, but he was a polygamist and that brought trouble into the family. Hannah is here presented as the picture of a godly mother—a rare exception of piety in a degenerate and corrupt age. She greatly desired to be the mother of one who should become a blessing to the nation by bringing them back to the service of God. V. 21. It was not imperative for women to attend the solemn feasts, Exo. 23: 17, but this whole family seem to have been in the habit of going. Nor is it plain which of the three feasts is meant, if indeed more than one was then in existence. *His vow*.—In order to make Hannah's vow obligatory it was necessary that her husband should solemnly express concurrence in it. V. 23. The politeness of Elkanah and the ready deference paid to his wife's wishes in this matter are simply admirable. V. 24. *When weaned*—about three years old. *Three bullocks*—one for each year of his life—were provided—a costly sacrifice. *An ephah*—about eight gallons. *Bottle of wine*—a skin of wine; bottles in those days consisted of goat-skins flayed from the bodies of the animals, uncut except at the legs and neck which were tied with a cord. *The house of the Lord in Shiloh*—i. e. the Tabernacle which had remained ever since Joshua's time at Shiloh, seventeen miles north from Jerusalem, and which continued to be the religious centre and capital of the nation until the close of Eli's administration when it fell into decay on account of the ark being carried off by the Philistines, ch. 4: 3-11. Vs. 26, 27. Standing in the very spot where she had prayed and vowed, years before, vs. 10-12, Hannah now brings the child to Eli and solemnly asserts that she is the same person with whom he had conversed at that time. Though he may have forgotten all about it she has not forgotten his words nor her own vow. If she did not leave Samuel at Shiloh just then, it was not long before he was found ministering to the Lord there, ch. 2: 18, 19. After the death of Eli, Samuel was the means of inducing the people to forsake idolatry and return to the worship of Jehovah, ch. 7: 3, 4. Children can never do enough for their parents: they may never know how much of their success and happiness is in answer to a pious mother's prayer. They should be brought under the influence of religious teaching when very young.