

All day he is the slave who forever and monotonously grinds. But what brawny limbs and magnificent muscle and massive frame! What a man of war he would make if he only had his sight and his liberty! What a splendid head he has! His hair has been cut lately and the noble shape of his head is to be clearly seen. He might not only fight but lead in the fight. While we look at him he turns toward us, lifting those poor sightless eyes, yet still grinding. You can see his face now still better. "Why," you say, "we know the man!" It is Samson, the great Nazarite, athlete, hunter, fighter for the Hebrews, his long locks flowing in the wind. No common man, but Israel's leader, judge, hero, saviour at times, and the hated victor of the Philistines. Ah, Samson, how fallen to-day! not beaten in the fight, but a Nazarite shorn of his locks by a harlot, tripped by the wiles of a Philistine woman. Unhappy slave! However, the horrible wounds inflicted upon his eyes are healing. Now and then he puts his hand up to his head and mutters, "My hair is growing!"

But who are these crowding about the altars of Dagon? They bring offerings. They light the red, bloody fires. They make obeisance. They shout, they dance, they rejoice. Dagon has delivered Samson into their hands. How changed are the times! Israel's leader is grinding in the prison-house. How they praise their god! Good Dagon! Great Dagon! Glorious Dagon! All the while the dumb old block with hideous eyes stares senselessly at its worshippers. "Call for Samson!" somebody has shouted. They have gone for him. They stay his grinding. They unfasten the chain binding him to his task. As if a big fettered bear were led

out of the depths of Lebanon's forests, so the big, blinded warrior is led before the idolaters, and how their crazy shouts rend the air! He lifts his useless eyes. May be, as he feels the cool, pure air blowing upon him, he wishes he could see once more the blue sky, the green fields, the rounded hills of his Hebrew home! If he could only see his old father and mother! But there are the taunting and maddening shouts of the Philistines as they call upon him to make sport for them! Is Delilah among the spectators, looking contemptuously down? He puts his hand up to his head and mutters, "My hair is growing!"

He says something to the lad guiding him. He wants to lay his hands on the pillars supporting the house. He lifts his head toward the sky. Hark! Does any one hear a blind man's prayer about his enemies? It is not like that in later days ascending from a cross, but may be he is thinking more of his country's cause than his own injuries. The prayer is finished and death comes soon. No more grinding in the prison-house, no more days of blindness, but under the ruin-heap somewhere is the mangled body of one who has liberty and sight at last. Was Delilah under that ruin-heap also? A sorrowful band has come up from Israel. They stoop down to the bruised, broken body. They lift it tenderly. They carry it away on a bier. You can follow the slowly winding train across the land of the Hebrews. You can tell their route by the cries of grief that pierce every-where. They halt at last at a tomb between Zorah and Eshtaoel. There they lay down to its unbroken rest the body of Samson, warrior, sometimes hero, judge of Israel for twenty years.

B. C. 1312.]

Ruth 1. 16-22.



[Commit to memory verses 16-18.]
16 And Ruth said, 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:

17 Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if I ought but death part thee and me.

18 When she saw that she was steadfastly minded to go with her, then she left speaking unto her.

19 So they two went until they came to Beth-le-hem.

LESSON XII.

RUTH'S CHOICE.

[Dec. 23.]

And it came to pass, when they were come to Beth-le-hem, that all the city was moved about them, and they said, Is this Na-o'm?

20 And she said unto them, Call me not Na-o'm, call me Ma-ra: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me.

21 I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty: why then call ye me Na-o'm, seeing the Lord hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me?

22 So Na-o'm returned, and Ruth the Mo'ab-it'ess, her daughter-in-law, with her, which returned out of the country of Mo'ab: and they came to Beth-le-hem in the beginning of barley harvest.

General Statement.

The Book of Ruth opens a picture of peace in the midst of centuries of war. While Gideon was breaking the Midianite yoke in the north, quiet reigned in the south of Israel. During the peaceful relations of Moab and Israel, a family of Bethlehem removed from their ancestral home to the land on the east of the Dead Sea. There the sons married the daughters of the land, and enjoyed a few brief years of happiness. But death entered that happy home, and Naomi, widowed, childless, and poor, prepared to return to her own land. Her two daughters-in-law, the widows of her sons, went forth to accompany her. At the borders of Moab there were tears and embraces, Orpah gave to Naomi the kisses of farewell, but Ruth clung to her, resolved to become her

companion. Hand in hand they journeyed together down the mountains of Moab, across the valley of the Jordan, and up the ravines of Judah. They returned to Naomi's home in Bethlehem, and Ruth the Moabitess became Ruth the Israelite, having chosen Israel for her people and Jehovah for her God. At Bethlehem she entered upon a life of poverty and toil, gleaning in the fields for her daily supply of food. But her faith was rewarded by the care of God, by the fellowship of God's people, and by an honored place in her adopted country. She became the wife of the rich and the noble Boaz, the ancestress of David the king, and of David's greater Son, the King of kings.

Explanatory and Practical Notes.

Verses 16. And Ruth said. Ruth belonged to the people of Moab, whose home was east of the Dead Sea, between the rivers Zered and Arnon. They were descended from Lot, the nephew of Abraham, and hence were related to the Israelites. But they had lost the knowledge of the true God and were idolaters, worshipping the idol Chemosh. The descendants of Jacob were

the only people among the many nations of the Abrahamic stock who clung to Abraham's God. After one of the earliest of the foreign oppressors, that of Egypt (Judg. 3), there was peace between Moab and Israel during most of the period of the Judges. It was probably about the time of Gideon that Elimelech and his wife Naomi came to Moab from the tribe of