

**EXPOSITORY
DISCOURSES ON
THE BOOK OF RUTH**

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Expository Discourses on the Book of Ruth by T. N. Toller

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T. N. TOLLER

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PREFACE.

THOUGH the book of Ruth forms but a small and perhaps it may be said, with regard to many persons, a comparatively neglected part of the word of God, it will be found richly to deserve the attention of the lover of antiquity, and of the student of human nature, as well as of the devout observer of Providence; for it contains facts of which it may well be said, "whoso is wise and will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving kindness of the Lord" It exhibits an interesting picture of ancient manners and customs, as they existed in a country widely remote, and in circumstances very different from our own. It presents the workings and developements of human passions and affections, in difficult and trying situations; while it shows us how God renders the most common, and as they are often called, the most fortuitous circumstances, subservient to the accomplishment of his plans, in the rewarding of virtue and piety, in the fulfilment of prophecy, and even in raising up a Saviour for the world.

At the same time, viewed as a portion of the word of God, it must be owned that this book presents some difficulties to the student of the Scriptures. Infidels have founded some of their objections on its simple narrative. They have charged it with sanctioning craft and deceit, and licentious intercourse. These objections if not formally stated and answered, are effectually obviated in the following lectures; whilst the pictures which the book gives of ancient manners, and the lessons of piety which it teaches are presented in a clear and impressive light.

The amiable and excellent author of these lectures, thought very highly of the utility of expository discourses, as affording the preacher an opportunity of advancing many things well calculated to be highly useful to his hearers, but which could not well be introduced into sermons—as suggesting to his own mind many ideas which might not have occurred had he not studied the bible with a view to expound it to his people,—and as calculated to lead the hearers into a more extensive and accurate acquaintance with the Scriptures than they otherwise would have obtained, and thus enabling the preacher to present to his audience in the most useful and attractive way, the whole counsel of God. And all who have heard him will allow that his expository discourses were, as well as his sermons, highly interesting and instructive.

Indeed, whether he preached, or expounded, he presented that, which is considered, the great desideratum of the present day, an *earnest* ministry. Probably no man that ever ascended a pulpit, possessed in a higher degree the ability to throw his soul into every sentence that he uttered. And this he did *naturally*, and it may be said, owing to his deep piety and fine feelings, *necessarily*, without any thing like bustle, or vociferation. He possessed the golden secret for a preacher, as well as for an actor, he had "learned to feel." Hence, his discourses were always judicious as well as affectionate. Whatever he advanced came from both his mind and his heart, and that was the great cause why it deeply interested his hearers, and why a large and respectable congregation, for forty years hung upon his lips, and anticipated the return of the Sabbath with pleasure. His manner, though simple and natural, was, in the highest degree impressive. So that the language of *Æschines* respecting *Demosthenes* might well be employed in the case of those who are pleased with his written discourses, "what would you have been if you had heard him."

The following discourses lie under the disadvantage of not having been intended for the public, and of not having been revised by the author. He never in his public ministrations, affected any thing like fine, or elegant, or high-

ly wrought composition. He rather aimed at a plain, striking, colloquial style. His object was to cause all his hearers to understand and to feel, in order that they might profit by what they heard. And this end he attained in a high degree.

Any profit derived from the sale of this small volume is to be devoted to a benevolent purpose. It will be highly acceptable and interesting to all who knew the author, and especially to those who had the privilege of sitting under his ministry. But it will also amply repay all who read it, for their money and their time. May the blessing of God and the influence of his Spirit, render these discourses abundantly useful.

SERMON I.

RUTH. CHAPTER I.

I HAVE chosen this short book as a subject of expository meditation not only as containing a most beautiful, pathetic, and interesting story ; but as carrying on the same subject with that of Esther, viz., the doctrine of providence, only on quite another scale. There, providence appeared as regulating the affairs of courts, and kingdoms, and whole bodies of men ; here as interesting itself in the concerns of inferior and private life, and giving a beautiful illustration of our Lord's remark, that a "sparrow does not fall to the ground without our father, and that the hairs of our head are all numbered."

And another motive for the choice of this book was, that we shall have occasion in the course of our meditations on it, to make a number of remarks suitable to this particular season of the year.*

*This Sermon was preached August 9th, 1807.

The original subject of this little history, was one Elimelech, who in the time of the Judges resided at Bethlehem-judah. In consequence of a famine which arose in the land, he left his native city, and with his wife and two sons, went to sojourn in the country of Moab. It is a remarkable circumstance, that the neighbourhood about Bethlehem-judah was one of the most delightful spots in all Judea ; hence it was called, Bethlehem Ephratab, which signifies the house of bread ; strikingly shewing, how much more dependant we are upon the will of providence, than upon the fertility of the soil for our supplies. Without his blessing the house of bread becomes the land of barrenness. And a succeeding clause suggests a beautiful idea of the light in which every successive harvest ought to be viewed ; it is "the Lord visiting his people in giving them bread," it is the great Lord of nature sending to his creatures their annual income of blessings, which he could, and might justly have withholden.

But we read, that in these circumstances of embarrassment and scarcity, Elimelech left his home, and went to reside in the land of Moab. It is difficult to say how far Elimelech was justifiable in this step. It is a serious

thing for a man to leave his post, and throw himself out of the situation in which providence appears to have placed him. There ought to be some very strong reason to warrant such a step. When it is a case of absolute necessity, and a man must either beg, or starve, or injure others if he remain where he is, providence seems to intimate, that it is his duty to remove. But it does not appear that it was so with Elimelech, he went out full, Naomi says; and therefore he might, and perhaps should have remained at home and assisted his poor neighbours; then too he would have had access to those sources of religious consolation which Judea afforded but Moab did not. We know that we ought to be very cautious how we interpret providential dispensations into judgments, but it appears to me that Naomi viewed what followed their removal into the land of Moab as a frown of providence for that hasty step which they had taken. The fact is, men must expect to meet with crosses and inconveniences in all situations; and where they desert their post to avoid one, they may very probably meet with ten of another kind in the place of their choice; and go where you will you cannot get beyond the reach of disease and death.