
A table of contents for *The Expository Times* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expository-times_01.php

pdfs are named: [Volume]_[Issue]_[1st page of article].pdf

probably the most conspicuous of all the objects that met the eyes of the worshippers in the court. On this account it needed to be furnished with steps; whereas steps had been strictly forbidden in the construction of the altar of the tabernacle (Ex 20[26]). And Ezekiel's altar is adorned by two mystical names, Harel and Ariel, on the explanation of which it is not necessary to enter at present.

(To be continued.)

Giving: A Study in Oriental Manners.

By the Rev. G. M. Mackie, M.A., Beyrout.

In the East the custom of giving gifts affects all the relationships of life, domestic, social, commercial, political, and religious. The references to gifts and giving in the Bible suggest an appreciation of their suitability and influence very similar to that which prevails at the present day in Syria. The importance of the subject is indicated by the fact that a *sacrifice* is a gift presented to God: *grace* (gratia, χάρις) gets its meaning from the kindness that prompts a gift and the gratitude excited by its reception, and in Oriental usage it is often the courteous equivalent of *wages*. As gift-giving is so frequently alluded to in the Bible, and occurs in such important relationships, it is well to ascertain its exact Oriental value, by what means this value has become established, and what service, for good or evil, gift-giving renders in the ordinary affairs of life.

A study of the origin and innermost significance of this custom reveals a deep distinction between Western and Oriental life. The former is rich in civil equality, the authority of statute, and the impartial administration of law. The poor as well as the rich have rights, liberties, and independence. Any menace to civil liberty at the present day is rather from the feudalism of labour than from that of birth and station. It is unnecessary to proclaim that the labourer is worthy of his hire (Lk 10[7]). The East, on the other hand, abhors civil equality, frets under written statute, and retreats easily from pledges and promises. Ethical ideals flash in poetry, and do parade in proverbs, but practical life brushes aside things so disembodied and abstract. Duty, without some one to see it done, is a dead letter. An absent master usually means household disorder and neglected service (Mt 24[45-51], Mk 13[34-37]).

The East is ruled by personality not protocol; presidents not precedents. Public justice defined and administered by statute seems to dislocate and sterilize social life. The rich and powerful cannot benefit by their superior position as they would like to do, and the poor lose what they can get by cringing and flattery, and are thrown upon their own resources. The East resents political economy as a Western provincialism. Thus in all the relationships of life affected by rank and office, wealth and employment, Oriental society cleaves into two sections the protecting and protected, those who command and those who obey, and too often those who patronize and those who beg. 'He who eats the Sultan's bread must strike with his sword.'

It is difficult in lands of law-defended liberty, democratic representation, and freedom of the press to realize how much is awanting where these are absent, and how great an importance comes to be attached to the means and resources by which, when right cannot be legally enforced, promises may nevertheless obtain fulfilment, the indifferent be made interested, the alienated reconciled, and the powerful and rich become considerate and gracious. It is in this connexion that the giving and receiving of gifts plays such a prominent part. The Oriental, while weak in the sense of justice, indifferent to civil liberty, and unscrupulous in the evasion of statute law, can always be appealed to, more or less effectively, on the score of personal dignity, family honour, public sentiment, and the fear of God. He is influenced by feelings rather than facts, personal comfort and advantage rather than conscientious conviction, by considerations of friendship and religion rather than legal definitions and the sense of justice. If Bunyan had dreamt his dream in the East, Mr. Worldly-Wiseman would have been the pilgrim.

It is under such conditions of personal temperament and social circumstance that the habit of giving gifts has been established, and it is due to these conditions that a gift often conveys a meaning beyond its intrinsic value and apparent purpose. Amid much variety as to the occasions of giving, and the character of the things given, there are two principal uses. The first and fundamental meaning is affectionate and sincere, and owes its popularity to the warm and impulsive feelings of the people within a certain area. It is the expression and proof of the sincerity of love (2 Co 8^{8}). The second is utilitarian. 'A man's gift maketh room for him' (Pr 18^{16}). The abounding hypocrisy that surrounds this second meaning is a tribute to the reality and strength of the original affectionate meaning thus simulated.

For illustration we must turn to the circumstances in Oriental life that make gift-giving popular and expedient. To the visitor to the East, beset on all hands by demands for *backshish*, 'a present,' the principle of gift-giving seems to be the summary of Oriental life and all its institutions. Under analysis, the principle reveals three factors: (1) Family Life; (2) Social Life; (3) Religion.

1. *Family Life.*—Here the giving of gifts is pleasant and unconstrained: the proof of the abundance rather than merely the sincerity of love. Special occasions are birth, betrothal, marriage, recovery from sickness, and return of a member of the family from a journey. Money is freely given and lent, the refusal of it being considered shameful, and causing alienation not easily forgotten. A favourite gift is that of jewellery or clothing taken from the person and given to a friend to be a constant memorial of the absent, and a proof that he will be treasured in the heart even as his body is now encased in the clothes of his friend. Orientals attach much importance to something that has 'the smell of the friend.' It is personality and all that belongs to it. Such was the implication in Jonathan's robe given to David and the handkerchiefs obtained from St. Paul.

2. *Social Life.*—Public life is conducted, as far as possible, on family lines. The family is not merely an inner circle of affectionate devotion, it is also a guild of common interests. A daughter is, if possible, married among her relatives. A father putting his son in a shop or office says to the manager, 'He is your son,' implying complete authority over him and regard also for his welfare. The Oriental laws of neighbourhood teaching sympathy, toleration, and helpfulness spring from the family. Among the Bedouîn, with whom social life has been arrested at the family stage, a stranger has no existence as such; from the family point of view he is *for* or *against*, either to be received with kindness and honour or to be attacked and robbed. Among Orientals, those who have the same surname are spoken of as belonging to the same house. Relatives are preferred as partners and agents in business. The city is a larger house; the nation an expanded family. The Israelites were the sons of Israel, the house of Israel. The giving or receiving of gifts among those who are only on terms of social acquaintance or business relationship obtains popularity by promoting a feeling of family intimacy and identified interest.

The conditions of industrial life and the patriarchal form of government have further tended to develop the habit of giving gifts, making an affectionate act the means of attaining mercenary ends, and leading the way to bribery, intrigue, and dishonesty.

The Oriental landowner has always paid his labourers in kind—giving them a certain portion of the produce. It is a gift out of what is his personal estate. The sheikh or emîr of the leading family further protected the peasantry from the marauding Bedouîn, 'the children of the East,' and presents given to him were a grateful acknowledgment of protection and prosperity. Such gifts putting the receiver in the position of a benefactor, easily took the form of blackmail, and the omission of them was a grave discourtesy. Thus David regarded Nabal after having protected his shepherds. Starting from the simple conditions of pastoral and industrial life, the habit became resorted to wherever dignity had to be flattered or favourable intervention was needed. Such a gift was a מִנְחָה *minḥah*, something laid down by the person who brought it, and not referred to as a rule in the presence of the superior, who was told in complimentary language how much all were indebted to him and his supplicant in particular.

The chief occasions belonged to legal and political emergencies. In the East a judge is not merely a clerk of precedents administering statute law, but exercises his own private judgment on the matter laid before him. In the East all are

skilful lawyers, but the judicial mind is a rarity. Where the sense of justice is weak, and public opinion is servile and intimidated, the sentence of the judge is very apt to be affected by personal advantage and preference. To the Oriental litigant the chief thing is to obtain the judge's personal favour, and a present to him seems a more direct and effective outlay than feeing counsel and collecting witnesses. Even when the judge is known to be intelligent and upright, Orientals pay respect and send presents to the personal friends of the judge in order that they may use their influence with him. Thus, even under the rule of David, Absalom could spread sedition and discontent by declaring how he would revolutionize the administration of the land. Absolute freedom from this taint was a chief item in Samuel's testimony as to his own official life. Bribery in the administration of law is frequently inveighed against by the prophets as one of the chief causes of Israel's rejection.

The bringing of gifts by inferior princes and conquered kings is a favourite subject in the Egyptian paintings, and Scripture history abounds in instances of the same ceremony. It gave official publicity and consummation to the new relationship of protecting and protected, ruling and ruled over. It was in keeping with Oriental custom that the Magi brought gifts to the infant King in Bethlehem. In the same way, the crowns of saint-hood and service are cast before the throne of glory.

On the other hand, gifts from a superior to an inferior carried with them something of the dignity of the giver. Common wages were an uplifting recognition (מַשְׂאֵת, *mas'eth*) of the master's favour, and were received with obeisance, finding their nearest modern equivalent in civic decoration and the soldier's medal. But amid the sordid and mercenary actualities of life, the sense of honour was often insufficient, and had to be supplemented by definite regulations (Lv 19^{13}, Jer 22^{13}, Mal 3^{8}).

It was one of the new things in Christ's ministry that the gospel was preached to the poor.

3. *Religion.*—The claims of religion are much more intimately interwoven with common affairs in the East than they are in the West. There is nothing of Sunday segregation.

All business prosperity is publicly declared to be from God, whatever may be the means taken to obtain it. Two sentences especially are often seen written over shop-doors, '*Prosperity is in God's hand*' and '*This is also from the grace of my Lord.*' Street beggars recognize this, and pause for a gift when they see a purchase being effected. Something is due to them as a share of the profit from the same Lord. A beggar at the door does not plead his poverty or attempt to explain his circumstances, but pronounces the name of God, and says, 'I am a guest at your door!' and if the door is not opened, calls aloud, 'You are also servants!' The beggar is seldom dismissed from the door with the declaration that there is nothing for him. He is told, '*God will give you.*' Similarly, the constant cry at the side of the street is, 'God will bless you'; 'God will direct your path'; 'God will repay it.'

The custom of giving gifts in its best and most sincere applications thus has its origin in duty to the family and indebtedness to God. Its adaptation to more social and public relationships is the result of these two. Indifference to family honour and the claims of religion makes the 'profane person' or 'fool' of the Bible. The unjust judge (Lk 18^{1-8}) is sharply silhouetted by the omission of these two principal regards. Orientally there was no third position such as that of an official acting justly for the sake of justice, although atheistical and immoral in personal life.

In the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, the former was told that the good and evil of life in each case had been God's gift. He was within his Oriental right in asking a service from one who had been his neighbour. In the Parable of the Good Samaritan, the stranger would have been blameless in the eyes of local tradition if he had refrained from interfering. He stands out in the setting of Oriental circumstance doing the part of a neighbour, where the fellow-believer and brother in blood had been unfaithful to the two great claims of religion and race.

These two in the East take the place of Western social justice with its legally defined and defended rights. They are seen in the modern European Jew, both in their intensity and limitations. Theology has to look at the Incarnation in the light of Oriental usage as to gift-giving, 'God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.' That gift brought the whole of humanity into family regard and relationship, and claimed the full meaning of protector and protected that was associated with a gift from a superior to an inferior. The necessity for a new interpretation of

God and man on this account was the first missionary problem of the gospel. St. Paul accepted the new delimitation, and stood as a debtor to the whole world. It was foolish and disobedient for the servant to ignore where the Master of all had recognized, or to maintain hostility after He had spoken the word of reconciliation.

Apart from the Bible, Oriental religious thought has given expression to a state of things in which family affection and duty to God would unite to form a universal religion. One of its aphorisms says, 'Creation is the family of God, and God's most beloved are those who most benefit His family.' But the common practice runs on the lines of the common proverb, 'My brother and I against my cousin; my cousin and I against the stranger.' The result of 'God's unspeakable gift' has been not merely to give a new and larger idea, but to introduce the power that can effect its fulfilment.

At the Literary Table.

THE BOOKS OF THE MONTH.

	S.	D.
THE PALESTINIAN SYRIAC VERSION OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES. By G. Margoliouth, M.A. *Soc. of Bibl. Arch.*		
THE PREPARATION AND DELIVERY OF SERMONS. By J. A. Broadus, D.D., LL.D. *Hodder & Stoughton.*	10	6
THE BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR. I, II, III JOHN, JUDE. By J. S. Exell, M.A. *Nisbet.*	7	6
A STUDY OF ETHICAL PRINCIPLES. By James Seth, M.A. *Blackwood.*	7	6
THE MESSIAH: SERMONS ON OUR LORD'S NAMES, TITLES, AND ATTRIBUTES. By C. H. Spurgeon. *Passmore & Alabaster.*	7	0
ERAS OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH. THE AGE OF CHARLEMAGNE. By Charles L. Wells, Ph.D. *T. & T. Clark.*	6	0
THE SPRING OF THE DAY. By Hugh Macmillan D.D., LL.D., F.R.S.E. *Isbister.*	5	0
JESUS AND THE RESURRECTION. By the Rev. A. G. Mortimer, D.D. *Longmans.*	5	0
SERMONS ON SOME WORDS OF ST. PAUL. By H. P. Liddon, D.D., D.C.L., LL.D. *Longmans.*	5	0
THE INVESTMENT OF INFLUENCE. By N. Dwight Hillis. *Oliphant.*	5	0
THE HOLY BIBLE. Vol. vi. Edited by J. W. Mackail. *Macmillan.*	5	0
THE CHRISTIAN PICTORIAL. Vol. x. *Alexander & Shepheard.*	4	6
THE CHRISTIAN INTERPRETATION OF LIFE. By W. T. Davison, M.A., D.D. *Kelly.*	4	6
THOUGHTS ON THE LORD'S PRAYER. By Elizabeth Wordsworth. *Longmans.*	4	6
THE PSALMS AT WORK. New and Enlarged Edition. By C. L. Marson. *Stock.*		
BROWNE'S RELIGIO MEDICI, AND OTHER ESSAYS. Edited by D. Lloyd Roberts, M.D., F.R.C.P. *Smith, Elder, & Co.* Net	3	6
THE EPISTLE TO THE EPHESIANS. By Charles Gore, M.A., D.D. *Murray.*	3	6
STUDIES IN TEXTS. By Joseph Parker, D.D. *H. Marshall.*	3	6
THE GENTLENESS OF JESUS. By Mark Guy Pearse. *H. Marshall.*	3	6
THE BURDENS OF LIFE. By Alfred Rowland, LL.B., B.A. *H. Marshall.*	3	6
GENESIS AND SCIENCE. By John Smyth. *Burns & Oates.*	3	6
LIGHT AND LEADING. Vol. ii. Edited by H. W. Horwill, M.A. *Allenson.*	3	0
GOD'S MEASURE, AND OTHER SERMONS. By the Rev. J. T. Forbes, M.A. *Oliphant.*	2	6
COMPANIONS OF THE SORROWFUL WAY. By John Watson, D.D. *Hodder & Stoughton.*	2	6
THE CHILDREN OF WISDOM, AND OTHER SERMONS. By the Rev. John de Soynes, M.A. Toronto: *Briggs.*		