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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

# THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

## Notes of Recent Exposition.

THERE is a most interesting story in the fourteenth chapter of the First Book of Samuel. It occurs in the very heart of the struggle between Israel and the Philistines. These two tiny neighbouring nations were in fierce conflict for the supremacy. And the whole world was looking on. For what would it have been to the world if the Philistines had prevailed? Would Isaiah have come from Askelon? Would the Messiah have been born in Ashdod?

The supremacy fell to Israel. And the world will ever remember with gratitude the names of the men who secured it. Certainly there is not one of them but would have said that the arm of the Lord had done it. Samuel and David, Saul and his son Jonathan—in this they would unite sincerely, and even fervently, crying, 'Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us.' But the work of God on earth is done by human hands. The world will ever remember gratefully the names of Samson, of Samuel and David, of Saul, and of Saul's son Jonathan.

In the fourteenth chapter of the First Book of Samuel Jonathan is the hero. Saul is king. And he behaves with a certain kingly superiority to consequence. But Jonathan is the hero. In no romance of boyhood do we follow the hero's fortunes with the breathless interest with which we still watch Jonathan and his armour-bearer as they agree to go over together to 'the Philistines' garrison that is on yonder side.' For the modern romance always omits one element of interest, the most deeply moving of all. It is the challenge to God. At every step of the foolhardiest enterprise God is called upon to show Himself on the side of the brave. It was not a clear conception of the will of God. It made Him appear sometimes to be the author of actions which were none of His. The challenge to God was not always quite separate from selfishness. But it was a religious act. No enterprise was ever undertaken on the toss of a coin. The modern writer of romance who leaves God out altogether, leaves out the most deeply and universally thrilling element in a narrative of adventure. 'Come,' said Jonathan, 'and let us go over unto the garrison of these uncircumcised: it may be that the Lord will work for us: for there is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few.'

But as we pass on through the entrancing story—the consternation of the Philistines and the rout, the astonishment in the army of Saul, the discovery of the absence of Jonathan, the pursuit, Saul's inconsiderate command that all food should be tabu till the evening, the enlightening of Jonathan's eyes through the tasting of the forbidden honey, the roll-call and the discovery of

the culprit—we are at last pulled up by a passage which we cannot understand.

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It is the forty-first verse of the chapter. 'Then said Saul unto all Israel, Be ye on one side, and I and Jonathan my son will be on the other side. And the people said unto Saul, Do what seemeth good unto thee. Therefore Saul said unto the Lord, the God of Israel, Shew the right. And Jonathan and Saul were taken by lot; but the people escaped.' It is the phrase 'Shew the right' that is not intelligible. When we turn to the Hebrew text we find that it consists of only two words. And we see that, as pointed, they scarcely admit of an intelligible translation. 'Shew the right' is little more than a clever shot at the meaning, made by the Revisers of the Old Testament. On their margin they suggest 'Give a perfect lot,' which is the translation of the Bishops' Bible and of the Authorized Version. Coverdale tries, 'Do that right is'; Matthew, 'Give perfect knowledge'; while the margin of the Authorized Version suggests 'Shew the innocent.' Thus the Revised Version is not even original. It is a combination of Coverdale and the A.V. margin, adopted from a reasonable supposition of what the context requires.

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The trouble is in the Hebrew. 'As a matter of fact,' says Dr. Buchanan Gray, 'and as scholars, whether Protestant or Roman Catholic, have now perceived, the Hebrew text has suffered a considerable loss at this point owing to that common source of error, *homoioteleuton*.' From the first occurrence in the original text of the words 'Lord God of Israel,' the eye of the scribe passed at once to their second occurrence. Whereupon one occurrence of that phrase as well as the words between were lost to the Hebrew text. But they were preserved in the Greek translation. Through it they passed into the Old Latin versions. And although Jerome translated directly from the Hebrew, the influence of the Old Latin secured their reinsertion in the Vulgate. From the Vulgate they passed into Wyclif, the Great Bible, and later editions of the Douai Bible. Thus in the Great Bible the verse reads as follows (the portion which is not found in the Hebrew being placed within parenthesis): Therefore Saul said unto the Lord God of Israel: 'Give a perfect lot (Lord God, give Thou the judgment. How happeneth it, that Thou givest Thy servant no answer to-day? If this sin be in me or in Jonathan my son, shew it; or if this iniquity be in Thy people). And Saul and Jonathan were caught, but the people escaped free.' This is easier to understand. It would have been clearer if the technical terms had been taken over instead of being translated. Dr. Gray takes them over. And then for the crucial sentence he obtains the perfectly intelligible translation: 'If this iniquity be in me, or in Jonathan my son, give Urim; or if this iniquity be in thy people Israel, give Thummim.'

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The passage is discussed in a paper by Professor Buchanan Gray on 'The Text of the Old Testament,' which occurs in a volume entitled *Mansfield College Essays* (Hodder & Stoughton; 12s. net). The volume has been prepared on the occasion of the seventieth birthday of Dr. A. M. Fairbairn. It contains as many as eighteen essays. And yet there is not one of them (for we have found the book worth reading from beginning to end) that does not make some profitable contribution to the subject which it handles. But let us return meantime for a moment to Dr. Gray.

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The remarkable thing which comes out of the discussion of our passage in the First Book of Samuel is that those versions which are furthest removed from the original Hebrew contain the best translation. The English Versions of the Bible may be divided into two classes—the primary and the secondary. The primary versions have been translated direct from the Hebrew. They are Tindale's, the Genevan, the A.V. and the R.V. The secondary are translations of another translation. They are Wyclif's, Coverdale's, and the Douai Bible. And the remarkable thing, we say,

is that in this case at least the secondary English Versions are the better.

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The discovery raises a question which is of the greatest moment in the translation of the Old Testament. What place should be given to the Ancient Versions? The Revisers practically gave them no place at all. Dr. Buchanan Gray has no hesitation in holding that on that account, if on that account alone, we ought as soon as possible to entertain the idea of superseding the Revised Version of the Old Testament by a new translation.

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When Alexander the Great conquered Asia he conquered it for Christ. For when Christ said to His disciples, 'Go ye into all the world,' He sent them to a world to which Alexander had given a common language. And wherever they went they found people who could understand them, as they spoke the Greek language of their own ordinary conversation.

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This common tongue is called the *Koinê*. We must become familiar with that word. Properly speaking, it is a Greek adjective (κοινή) meaning common, and it is understood to qualify the Greek substantive meaning dialect (διάλεκτος). But it is now used freely as a substantive itself. What does it signify?

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The fullest account in English of what the Koinê is will be found in the first volume of Professor Moulton's *Grammar of New Testament Greek*. There is a shorter account of it in Mr. Thackeray's *Grammar of the Septuagint*, the first volume of which has just been published at the Cambridge University Press. Mr. Thackeray adopts the definition of it which has been given by Professor Thumb of Marburg, 'the man who has done more than any other to promote a study of it and to point the way to its correct appreciation.' The Koinê, says Professor Thumb, is 'the sum total of the development of the Greek of common and commercial speech from the time of Alexander the Great to the close of ancient history.'

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From the time of Alexander the Great. For when Alexander the Great began the conquest of the world the Greek language was separated into dialects. Some of the motley host which composed his army spoke Attic Greek, some spoke Ionic, some Doric. But as they associated with one another in the long marches by day or round the camp fires by night, their dialectical peculiarities disappeared. They had to understand one another. They had to learn to use a common tongue. The dialects were thrown into one large melting-pot, out of which came the Koinê.

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It is true that before the time of Alexander something must have been done towards wearing off the edges of the Greek dialects. Tradesmen from different parts of Greece had been exchanging language as well as merchandise. And the Ten Thousand in their retreat across Asia, under the leadership of Xenophon, had almost forgotten that they had ever spoken different dialects when at the end of their heroic journey they shouted, 'The sea, the sea!' and fell upon one another's necks and wept. Yet the fusion of the dialects on the large scale took place under Alexander, and became final. It was Alexander who gave a universally understood or 'common' language to the civilized world.

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It is called the Koinê not because it was the language of common men, but because it became the language of the whole civilized world. It became the language of those States which hitherto had used different Greek dialects. With the single exception of the Old Laconic, which still held its own in the fastnesses of the Peloponnesus and lives on in the modern Zaconic, none of the old dialects survived in the competition with it. But it not only displaced the old dialects of Greece, it also became the language of nations which hitherto had been guiltless of speaking Greek. Our own knowledge of it has come largely

from the discovery of papyrus rolls, and these papyri have been discovered almost entirely in Egypt.

But for all that, we must remember, and we shall not understand the Koinê if we do not remember, that it was the speech of common men. It emerged from the necessities of daily intercourse. It could not sweep away the literary language of Greece, the language of the great poets and historians as it swept away the dialects. That literary language may refuse to disappear even before a majority vote in an English University. But so different are the literary language and the Koinê, that when the Koinê was found in the Septuagint and in the New Testament it was considered necessary to give it a distinctive name, and for a long time it was called by the name of Biblical Greek.

There is no such thing as Biblical Greek. The Greek of the Bible is the Koinê. For that which sprang up in the necessities of intercourse was found capable of sufficient polish to be made use of by writers like Polybius, Josephus, the Seventy, and even St. Paul.

We have to be ready always to give an answer concerning the hope that is in us. And sometimes it has to be the statement of truth and sometimes the refutation of error. But, either way, it must be appropriate to the time and the circumstances in which it is given. The simplicity of the gospel becomes darker than the darkest speculations of philosophy if it is spoken in unfamiliar language. But the preacher's supreme mistake is to occupy himself with objections which were made by a generation that is dead and gone.

For this makes his preaching both uninteresting and unprofitable. Relying upon books which he found in his father's library, he continues to reprove Tindale and to answer Huxley. But these men have received their reward. And the new generation, which has almost forgotten their names, is quite unconcerned with the wisdom or the folly with which they spake on earth. The students of a theological college recently asked one of their professors if anything had been said about the Book of Acts since the days of Baur and Zeller, and they enjoyed their own grim irony. These students will soon be preachers. Will they preach as if the conflict were still between faith and unbelief, or between a materialist and a spiritual theory of the universal, or between idealism and agnosticism?

These, says Dr. Neville Figgis, were the issues of the last generation. They are not the issues now. Dr. Figgis was the Hulsean Lecturer for 1908–9. He has published his lectures under the title of *The Gospel and Human Needs* (Longmans; 4s. 6d. net). As Hulsean Lecturer he knew that he was called upon to give an answer concerning the faith that is in him. And the very first question that he set himself to answer was, Where does the attack come from to-day? It does not come from the agnostics. It does not come from the materialists. It does not come from unbelievers. The attack to-day, says Dr. Figgis, comes from those who say that Christianity is one among many good religions.

Now it may be that Dr. Figgis is looking forward a little in his answer. But it is the business of the apologist and the preacher to look forward. Dr. Figgis may be looking forward a little, but it is certain that even if the full flood of anti-Christian religiousness is not yet upon us, it is already the one issue worth fearing and facing.

Haeckel is still alive. But the issue is not materialism. It is now recognized that man must profess a religion of some kind. If he is an animal, he is a religious animal and not a brute. The only question now is, which religion? The lists are thrown open. Many are entering the competition. Some of them, says Dr. Figgis, are very queer religions. But they claim to be religions. They would have no standing otherwise. And they have their advocates. Even Herbert Spencer's

agnosticism had to be called 'semi-theism' as time went on. And Positivists like Mr. Frederic Harrison are as emphatic as any Christian in condemning the blackness of materialism. In *The Creed of a Layman*, he says, 'We must give human nature its fair chance and accept what it demands; and if human nature calls out for Religion, religion it must have.'

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Are we to allow Christianity to enter this competition? We must allow it. We have hung back hitherto. We have spoken contemptuously about parliaments of religion. We have refused to look at any other religion than our own. It is all due to the device of the devil. Now we must reject this subtle appeal to our pride and our indolence. Already it is taken for granted that Christianity has entered and been thrown. Man must have a Religion. The exact form of the Religion of the future may not yet be agreed upon. It is condescendingly admitted that Christianity may contribute some elements to it. But it is taken for granted and expressed with great assurance, in innumerable cheap books and cheaper magazine articles, that the good Lord Jesus has had His day.

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We must allow Christianity to enter the competition. But we must see to it that it is Christianity that enters. Now, Christianity is the Religion of the supernatural. Certainly it is an ethical religion, and its ethics may be compared with the ethics of Confucius or the Stoa. But if it is allowed to enter into the competition as an ethical religion only, it is not Christianity that is allowed to enter. Dr. Conybeare, in his new book *Myth, Magic, and Morals*, has shown us what can be made of a Christianity that is first stripped of its supernaturalism. Other religions may be supernatural also. Many of them claim to be. Let them come, bringing their supernaturalism with them. We are willing to try the spirits wherever they are said to be found. But we must insist upon it, that it is unscientific and outrageous first to reject the possibility of a resurrection and then to say that 'on His grave the Syrian stars look down.'

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We do not need to deny the things that are common to Christianity and other religions. As Dr. Figgis says: 'We cannot now echo the vaunt of St. Augustine about the virtues of the pagan world being *splendida vitia*; or treat Muhammad as merely a false prophet. Nor can we deny the immense amount of interaction between the religion of Israel and other earlier systems. Above all, the knowledge of Mithraic worship in the Roman Empire has revealed the striking interdependence of the Christian Church and other cults.' But the question is not, has Christianity borrowed this or that? Nor even, is Christianity superior in this or that respect to other religions? The claim which we make for Christianity is that it is altogether unique, its uniqueness consisting in this, that it is a revelation of God to man, given in the Person of One who is at once God and Man, Christ Jesus.

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We make this claim. Can we make it good? Well, the first thing that we have to take into account is the fact that the same claim is made by other religions also. And the mere statement of this fact is considered to be enough to dispose of the Christian claim. We must consider the claims of other religions. We must dispose of them. Both historically and experimentally we must show that except the name of Jesus there is none other name given under heaven among men whereby we must be saved. How are we to approach the subject? We may approach it by the way of history or by the way of experience.

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Now when we approach the problem historically we are met at once by the objection that a religion which makes this claim makes a mistake, since it is impossible that God could select a certain moment of time in the history of the world to make a unique revelation of Himself. And when we approach it experimentally we are met by the objection that it is just as impossible that the

Eternal Spirit could concrete Himself in any particular person. These are the two main objections which the present age urges against the revelation of God in Christ. Dr. Figgis takes them in order.

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The first objection is that we are told to fix our thoughts upon a particular moment of time, the moment when Jesus was born in Bethlehem. That is a moment in the past, and we need something of the historical imagination even to fix our thoughts upon it. But the difficulty is not so much that it is a moment in the past as that it is a moment in time. It is said to be incredible that any particular moment should be lifted out of the infinite number of moments in the history of the world and stamped for ever with this significance. What is the apologist's answer?

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Dr. Figgis answers that the only thing in time that ever has significance is the moment. It is a difficult answer. But it is true, and it may be made triumphant. 'The value of monumental moments,' says Dr. Figgis, 'the feeling before some work of beauty that here at last is something finished, done for ever, that time and chance have no power upon the idea thus embodied, is inseparable from the sense of all greatness in art and life.' For confirmation he sends us to the English poet who has done most to express this truth, to Browning.

> All we have willed or hoped or dreamed of good shall exist;
> Not in its semblance, but itself; no beauty, nor good, nor power
> Whose voice has gone forth, but each survives for the melodist
> *When eternity affirms the conception of an hour.*

But the second is the supreme objection—that Christianity professes to find the Eternal Spirit in a particular person. Dr. Figgis supposes that it is the supreme and peremptory crux in the Incarnation. 'Think what it means. That infant at Bethlehem, God, the centre of all our worship, the source of all our being, the meaning of all our thought. Is it not "a thing imagination boggles at"?' And he frankly says it is.

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But immediately he adds that it is just this central paradox of the Gospel which gives it its charm for the common heart. There are only the two alternatives—the abstraction of the speculative thinker, or God concrete in Jesus the satisfaction of human need.

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And it is the only revelation that was waiting to be made. We knew already that God is great. We had discerned His greatness in the sublimity of the order in which we are placed. 'God is great,' the cry of the Muslims, is a truth which it needed no supernatural being to teach men.

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But that *God is little*—that is the truth which Jesus taught man. And the heart of Christendom has gone out to the story of Bethlehem and the manger, of the shepherds and the wise men, to the blessing of the children, to the words about the sparrows and the lilies. It is God in His humiliation, scorned, spat upon, dying, that has won the Christian and will win the world.