
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.

To the literature of the Fourth Gospel a charming addition has been made by Professor Percy GARDNER. It is charming, not because we are likely to agree with the conclusions to which its author comes, but because we see that he comes to his conclusions honestly and competently, and that then he expresses them in language of quite unusual felicity.

The Fourth Gospel is called *The Ephesian Gospel*, and that is the title of the book (Williams & Norgate; 5s. net). It is called the Ephesian Gospel because it was written in Ephesus. Of that Professor GARDNER has no doubt. The tradition goes back to the second century, 'and there is no rival view of any importance.' It is called the Ephesian Gospel, however, most of all because in this book Professor GARDNER lays stress on its relation to the religion and thought of 'the most important of the Greek cities of Asia Minor.'

And so the question is raised at once, Who wrote the Ephesian Gospel? Professor GARDNER says we do not know. He even says we shall never know. But, in spite of that, he comes very near to telling us. He says that there are three Johns to think about. There is John the Apostle, who could not have written it. There is John the Prophet, who wrote the Apocalypse, and therefore could not have written it. And there is John the Elder, who wrote the two short 'Epistles according to St. John,' and who on that account could not have written it. The Gospel and the first Epistle were certainly written by the same man. Who was he, and what was his name? We do not know what his name was, but Dr. Percy GARDNER believes that he was a disciple of John the Apostle.

Why could not John the Apostle have written the Ephesian Gospel himself? Professor GARDNER gives several reasons. First of all, he says generally that John the son of Zebedee is so improbable that we may regard him as set aside. Next, he says that as a literary composition it is quite beyond the powers of the fisherman of Galilee. 'It is very doubtful whether John the fisherman of Galilee would have had sufficient literary training to write any continuous composition, above all a composition in a language so little familiar to the Galilean peasants as Greek.' Then it seems to him 'quite incredible that if the Apostle John were the actual writer of the Gospel, he should have designated himself in it by the phrase "the disciple whom Jesus loved."' And finally, 'it is all but impossible that one who had been an actual companion of Jesus should have had all his recollections so transmuted in course of time that the Jesus reflected in the Synoptic Gospels should

have become transformed into the Jesus of the Fourth Gospel.'

So, you see, there is no actual evidence against the Apostle or in favour of another. It is all a matter of the impossible and the improbable. And as soon as Professor GARDNER'S improbables and impossibles are examined by some one else they have a way of passing into the possible and the probable. They do so sometimes even in his own hands. The last, for example. 'I say "all but impossible,"' he adds, 'not "impossible," because the early history of Christianity is so full of the utterly unexpected, of events which a historian finds it very difficult to account for, that one can scarcely venture to say what is and what is not impossible. The inspiration of the Church worked in ways so strange that we can only follow it with open minds and bated breath.'

The conclusion, then, is this. 'A man of philosophic mind and profound genius, had been as a young man converted by the preaching of St. Paul, which teaching he never did more than modify, never gave up. Afterwards coming under the strong influence of St. John or one of his immediate followers, he heard many details of the life of Jesus, listening with ears still full of the Pauline teaching, and a heart full of the spiritual presence of the Christ of the Church. The simple narrative of the eye-witness took in his mind a new and exalted character. He was convinced that the Apostles, even the most favoured of them, did not fully comprehend the life which was unrolled before them, and accepted the teaching only as it lay on the surface, not understanding the depths which lay beneath. Often between the words of his teacher he would see an opening into great spiritual vistas. At the same time, he clearly had a deep love and profound admiration for the son of Zebedee: he realised that the relation in which he had stood to his Master consecrated him for ever. Only, his eyes had been dazzled by seeing: those who had not seen, like St. Paul and himself, were in a sense more blessed; because to the vision of faith only, and not to the eyes of the body, could the true majesty of Jesus Christ become clear.'

The first question for the Christian preacher is, 'What shall I preach?' To which the answer is, 'The Gospel.' For assuredly, if he does not preach the Gospel, he is not a Christian preacher. 'Unto you is born this day in the city of David a saviour'—that is the beginning of the Gospel. That is the very first word of Christianity. And unless he begins there we say he is not a Christian preacher.

The second question is, 'How shall I preach it?' It is a much less important question, and may receive more than one good answer. But there are especially two answers that are good. One is, 'Preach it exegetically'; the other, 'Preach it topically.'

For many a day in this land of ours the only acceptable preaching was exegetical. In the morning the portion of Scripture expounded was short; in the afternoon it was long. The short exposition was called a sermon, the long a lecture. But, long or short, sermon or lecture, it was an explanation and application of a definite passage of Scripture.

Then came a change. It was a change of the second diet of worship from the afternoon to the evening. And corresponding to that change, perhaps partly the cause of it, was the substitution of a topic for a text. The topic at first was often ethical or even political. The more it departed from the exposition of a text, the more attention it attracted. But soon the ethical or political topic became as stale, flat, and unprofitable as any of the uses of this weary world. And then the discovery was made that if the topic were taken from the Bible and well managed, it was quite as good as a text and quite as lasting in interest.

And well managed, we say. For the topic is not so easily managed as the text. It requires

more literature. It demands more knowledge of the Bible. It calls for more patience in the selection and arrangement of materials.

Then another discovery was made. While a text is better to be begun and ended in one sermon, a topic is better to run over several sermons. Each sermon should be complete in itself. But if in its completeness it is not also isolated, but gives to and receives from the sermons that surround it, the interest in it is keener and the profit of it greater. That is why a modern preacher so often chooses a great subject and bases a whole winter's course of sermons on it.

And that is why the editor of this journal has determined to issue a series of volumes on the Great Christian Doctrines. He has long recognized the unsatisfactoriness of the occasional topic as well as of the occasional text. No doubt a small topic can and must be exhausted in a single sermon. But the great topics, like the great texts, are always better than the small. Then the leap from one topic or text to another gives a wrong impression of the unity of Revelation, and probably encourages a restless habit of mind. There is the interest of the moment, perhaps; there never is the sustenance which the systematic study of the Word furnished to our fathers.

The first doctrine chosen is Prayer. It is divided into twenty chapters. Each chapter fills about twenty pages. It contains more than any man should have in a single sermon, the idea being to provide plenty of material, especially illustrative material, and leave the preacher to make his own selection.

The first chapter is introductory. It has two divisions, the Proof of Prayer, and the Practice of it. The second chapter tells what Prayer is. It is Desire; it is Communion; it is Petition. Then the five great divisions of Prayer—Adoration, Confession, Petition, Intercession, Thanksgiving—are explained each in a separate chapter, and illustrated at every step of the explanation by short pointed quotations from recent literature.

The next three chapters make known the demands of prevailing prayer. The First Principles of Prayer are 'According to the Will of God,' 'In the Name of Christ,' and 'In the Power of the Spirit.' The Personal Demands of Prayer are Knowledge, Repentance, the Three Great Graces, and Importunity. Minor Aids to Prayer are Preparation, Practice, Definiteness, Humility, Energy, Patience, Service.

The eleventh chapter meets the Scientific Objections to Prayer; the twelfth, the Philosophical. Here a striking change of emphasis is to be noticed. A generation ago the scientific objections were uppermost and almost unanswerable. To-day they do not count. The real difficulties are philosophical. They are treated in this chapter in five parts—'Our Self-sufficiency,' 'The War of Interests,' 'What is Man?', 'A Perfect Providence,' and 'The Unchangeable Will.'

The next four chapters discuss the Value of Prayer, Hindrances to Prayer, Encouragements to Prayer, and the Perplexities of Prayer, separating these carefully and keeping in close touch with experience. The Perplexities of Prayer refer to the facts that sometimes there is no answer, sometimes the answer is delayed, and sometimes it is altogether different from that which was prayed for. This introduces the whole subject of Answers to Prayer dealt with in the seventeenth chapter, which ends with a discussion of the difficult matter of spiritual communications that pass like wireless telegrams from one person to another.

With the seventeenth chapter the subject could be closed. The eighteenth gives some account of Prayers to the Persons of the Trinity. The nineteenth considers fit times for Prayer. The twentieth gathers together some interesting facts on the Manner of Prayer, and contains a short discussion of the relative value of Extempore and

Liturgical Prayer. The last section of all shows the important place that belongs to the Voice in Prayer.

From the beginning of the book to the end of it two things are kept firmly to the front. The one thing is clear arrangement and steady progress. The other is contact with reality. No desire has existed in the mind of the editor to furnish any man with a ready-made series of sermons. To get the good of the book the preacher should read the open type and make his own sermon. Then he should read the illustrations and use them as freely as he pleases.

Five lectures were delivered at the University of London in February and March on *The International Crisis in its Ethical and Psychological Aspects* (Oxford University Press; 3s. 6d. net). One of the lecturers was Professor Gilbert MURRAY, whose subject was 'Herd Instinct and the War.'

What does Professor MURRAY mean by herd instinct? He takes two paragraphs to tell us. These are the paragraphs. He says: 'At the Natural History Museum, South Kensington, close to the entrance, you can buy for the sum of fourpence a most fascinating little book on *The Fossil Remains of Man*. It is official and, I presume, authoritative. And it tells how, in very remote times, before there was any South Kensington Museum, or any England, or, I believe, in the strict sense, any Europe, there lived in swampy forests in various parts of the world, troops of little lemur-like tree-dwellers. They were, I suppose, rather like small monkeys, but much prettier. They had nice fur, good prehensile tails, and effective teeth. Then there fell upon them, or some of them, a momentous change, a hypertrophy or over-development of one part of the body. This kind of special increase, the author tells us, seldom stops till it becomes excessive. With the lemurs it was the brain which began to grow. It grew and grew, both in size and in complexity. The rest of the body suffered in consequence. The fur became mangy and disappeared. The prehensile tails wasted away. The teeth ceased to be useful as weapons. And in the end, Ladies and Gentlemen, after incalculable ages, here we are!'

'Now,' he continues, 'these lemurs had certain instincts and habits of life. Let us define our terms. By an instinct I mean, following the exposition of Dr. MCDOUGALL, an innate psychophysical disposition to notice objects of a certain class, to feel about them in certain ways and to act correspondingly. They would notice an enemy, hate him and spit at him; notice an object that was good to eat, desire it and eat it. They made love, they protected their young, they defended their group against other groups. And primitive man inherited, with modifications, their instincts, and we have similarly inherited his. Some of them were generally desirable, and are consequently admitted and encouraged; others were generally undesirable, and have been habitually denied and suppressed in our conscious life, only to break out in dreams, in fits of insanity or passion, or more subtly in self-deception. But, suppressed or unsuppressed, man's instincts form the normal motive force in his life, though the direction of that force may from time to time be controlled by conscious reason.'

But what has herd instinct to do with the war? The war has produced both good results and evil results. These results, whether good or bad, are largely due to herd instinct.

The good results are 'a greater seriousness of life, less complaining, less obvious selfishness, and more hardihood. There is a universal power of self-sacrifice whose existence we never suspected before; on every side young men are ready to go and face death for their country, and parents are ready to let them go. There is more brotherhood and more real democracy; and at the same time, a quality of which we stood in much need, far more discipline and obedience.'

The evil results are yet more evident. So evident are they that Professor MURRAY scarcely troubles to name them. He only says that reformers and idealists are disheartened, that the friends of peace, of women's causes, of legal reform, of the mitigation of cruelty to animals, are all reduced to something like impotence; and that one hears the statement made that 'there is no Christianity left.'

The herd instinct is the source of both good and bad. Not all the good that the war has brought us, nor all the bad, can be traced to it. But much of both. And it seems to Professor Gilbert MURRAY that in the highest region of all the evil is likely to predominate.

The highest region of all is religion. Now there is nothing more manifest than that the war is changing the attitude of many men to religion. Some men it is making more religious and others less. Professor MURRAY talked on different days to two soldiers in Flanders, who spoke of their feelings of terror. One said, 'It made you believe in God, I can tell you.' The other said, 'It made you doubt the existence of God.' But the most pronounced and pitiable outcome of the war is the creation of a God after the image of his creator. And this is due to the herd instinct, the instinct that seeks the preservation of the nation.

Professor MURRAY refers to Mr. DYSON'S 'finely tragic' cartoon entitled 'Alone with his God.' The Kaiser is kneeling, a devout and fully armed figure, before another Kaiser exactly the same in dress and feature, but gigantic, august, enthroned amid the incense of ruined towns and burning churches. And there is a worse thing than that.

Besides the Kaiser's God of ruined towns and burning churches is the people's God of revenge. A Danish friend has sent Dr. MURRAY a quotation from a German religious poet, 'much admired in evangelical circles.' 'We have become the nation of wrath,' says the poet; 'we accomplish the almighty will of God, and will vengefully wreak the demands of His righteousness on the godless, filled with sacred fury.'

There are few occupations more interesting or, generally speaking, more futile, than to attempt to overturn the judgment of the ages. Yet it has been done. Mary Magdalene is an example. For many centuries Mary Magdalene was identified with 'the woman that was a sinner.' No scholar makes that identification now. Whatever Christ did for her when He drove the seven devils out of her, no scholar believes now that He rescued her from a life of infamy.

In challenging the judgment of the ages it is always an advantage to be able to show when and how the ages went wrong. We can do this in the case of Mary Magdalene. When Johnson was asked by a lady about a certain definition in his Dictionary, how it was that he came to define *Pastern* as the *knee* of a horse, he at once answered, 'Ignorance, madam, pure ignorance!' The answer of those who identified Mary Magdalene with the woman that was a sinner ought to be the same. Pure ignorance! They did not know the Gospels. They did not know that the stories about Mary Magdalene which passed from mouth to mouth in their day were not contained in the Gospels, but were contradicted by the Gospels. They wanted a name for the woman that was a sinner. They did not know that the Gospels had not given her the name of Mary Magdalene. Pure ignorance, madam! And in this case the judgment of the ages has been reversed.

The judgment of the ages must be reversed in another case. It is the case of 'the woman that was a sinner.' The judgment has been that she was a woman of abandoned life. Again the verdict was given in ignorance. It is a cruel verdict. It does the woman an intolerable injustice. It will have to go.

What is the evidence? It is given by Dr. PLUMMER in his edition of *St. Luke* in the International Critical Series of Commentaries. The evidence—there are those who will be astonished to hear it—the evidence is wholly contained in the one word 'sinner.' When Dr. PLUMMER has set down the Greek word (ἁμαρτωλός) which is translated here, as elsewhere, 'sinner,' he adds this note: 'A person of notoriously bad character and probably a prostitute.'

Now there is no doubt that the woman was a sinner. Where is the woman that is not? But you go rather far if you say of every sinner, 'a person of notoriously bad character.' And when you add 'probably a prostitute,' you are guilty of an outrageous offence. Yet there is no reason why 'sinner' should be translated 'prostitute' here more than elsewhere.

It is not to the point to say, as Dr. PLUMMER does, that the word translated 'sinner' sometimes has the meaning of 'prostitute.' A euphemism is allowable always. But when it has that meaning it is made quite plain that a euphemism is in use. Dr. PLUMMER does not quote a single example in which the word itself has that meaning. It is true he bids us compare Mt 21^{32}. But when we turn to Mt 21^{32}, what do we find? Not the word 'sinner,' but the word 'prostitute' (πόρνη). The truth is that when the Bible means prostitute, it says prostitute. The text to which Dr. PLUMMER points is plain enough: 'The publicans and the harlots believed him.'

What is the reason, then, that this woman who was a sinner has been so long and so generally regarded as a prostitute? Ignorance, madam! It has not been observed (though it is convincing enough when one does observe it) that the word 'sinner' has in the Synoptic Gospels a technical meaning. It describes a certain well-defined class of the people. In our Lord's day the nation of the Jews was divided into two classes, the 'righteous' (οἱ δίκαιοι) and the 'sinners' (οἱ ἁμαρτωλοί). In saying, 'I came not to call the righteous, but sinners' (Mt 9^{13}), Christ included all the people, and at the same time separated them into their two commonly recognized classes.

The division into two classes was so well known and so unhesitatingly admitted that Jesus did not need to explain. They all recognized the righteous; they all recognized the sinners. In general one might say that the righteous were those who knew the Law and endeavoured to keep it. The sinners did not know it, and for the most part did not try to keep even as much of it as they knew. What was the result? The result was contempt for the sinners on the part of the righteous and a comfortable dismissal of them to damnation. 'This people who knoweth not the law are cursed.'

And the righteous were very particular that there should be no intercourse between them and the sinners. This was their first and probably their last objection to Jesus. 'This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.' Well, one day one of the righteous class—his name was Simon—invited Jesus to dinner. While the dinner was in progress a woman who belonged to the sinner class came in and stood behind Jesus, weeping; and as she wept she wiped her tears off His feet with her hair. Simon was shocked. Not because she was a prostitute, but because she was a sinner. Had she been a prostitute he would certainly have been no more troubled than he was. It was not the degree of her sin that shocked him. It was the fact that Jesus, who was one of the righteous class, should allow a person who belonged to the class of sinners to come into close contact with Him.

The exact translation of the Greek words, according to the Revised Version, is: 'And behold, a woman which was in the city, a sinner.' That is to say, she was known in the city to belong to the sinners. The words seem to be purposely chosen to bring that out. But evidently, thought

Simon, Jesus is not aware of that. Dr. PLUMMER thinks that the city was Capernaum. It may have been, and again it may not. We do not know. But whatever city it was, Jesus would not be so well acquainted with the people as Simon, who lived in it, and whose first care it was to see that the distinction between the righteous and the sinners was maintained. Still, he argued with himself, if Jesus had been a prophet He would have known. Simon concluded that He was not a prophet. And no doubt he thought it was well worth giving the dinner to find that out.

Now if there is nothing to show that the woman was a person of evil fame, we shall henceforth give her the benefit. But is there nothing against it? There is this tremendous thing at least. When Jesus dismissed her with the blessing of forgiveness —just as he dismissed Zacchæus, who also was a sinner, and the nameless cripple who 'was borne of four'—He used these words: 'for she loved much.' It is almost incredible, but it is true, that into these words men have calmly read a reference to prostitution—as if our Lord were likely to speak of a life of lust and call it a life of love.

But there is another objection. By making this sinner a prostitute we have missed the lesson which the Evangelists wished to teach us when they selected this incident for narration. It is the lesson that it is easier for a sinner than for a righteous person to enter the Kingdom. Why is it easier? It is easier because the righteous person needs to be converted, and the sinner does not.

The righteous person needs to be converted, or, to use the better word of the Gospel, he needs to be 'born again.' In setting out to find God he has taken a wrong turning, and he has proceeded all the while along a wrong road. He has to be brought back. He has to begin again at the beginning. He has to start life anew as a little child. He has to proceed, not by counting the commandments that he keeps and the good deeds that he does, but by trusting and loving. 'Except ye turn,' said Jesus, 'and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven.'

The sinner does not require to be converted. He has sinned, as the righteous man has sinned. It is most probable that he has sinned more. In the Parable of the Two Debtors, Jesus gave Simon the benefit. Simon owed fifty pence; the woman owed five hundred. But fifty pence is as sure to damn a man as five hundred if he cannot get it paid. And there is no way by which the righteous man can get it paid. He must reluctantly take down every stone of the building which he has so laboriously built and begin again, for there is a fault in its foundation. The sinner has built no building. He has simply to begin to trust and love at the point where he is now standing. A 'God be merciful to me a sinner,' if it is sincere, is all that is required of him.

There is no lesson more insistently taught in all the Gospels. Jesus taught it in many ways. Wherever He went He taught it. He used a great variety of illustrations to catch the attention and reach the heart with it. He used the illustration of the two sons, one of whom said he would go and went not, while the other said he would not go but went. He used the illustration of the other two sons, one of whom departed to a far country and spent his substance in riotous living, while the other stayed at home and served. He used the illustration of the Pharisee and the publican who went up to the temple to pray. And He used the illustration here of the two debtors, one of whom owed five hundred pence, while the other owed but fifty. It is the lesson of lessons; and in this most pathetic example of it, more pathetic even than the story of the Prodigal, we have missed its meaning in our desire to prove that the worst of sinners may be saved, the very lesson being that degree of demerit has no place in the presence of the mercy of God in Christ.