

# THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

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## A Foreword.

### URGENT BUT NOT EXPOSITORY.

THE war has been a disappointment. Before it began there had been for some time a depression in religion. Church-going was falling off. There seemed to be so little to go to church for. Meetings for prayer had often to be abandoned.

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When the war began it was believed that all that would be changed. It was thought that men would go to the House of God in order to understand the meaning of the calamity of war. Women, it was confidently expected, would go for strength and consolation. It has all been a disappointment. After two and a half years of war, and unparalleled suffering, religion in the land is as lifeless as ever.

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The churches are in very many cases not so well attended as they were before the war. And that is not to be accounted for altogether by the fact that many men are fighting and many women working at the time when they used to be at church. The interest of public worship is difficult to maintain. So difficult is it felt to be that on every hand one hears of the impossibility of carrying it on after the war as it now is. And there is no difference between the service that follows a prescribed ritual and the service that does not. Whatever happens, says one, we cannot continue the present Morning and Evening Prayers. Whatever happens, says the

other, we cannot continue to preach the same theological sermons.

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Those are the remedies proposed—a shorter Prayer-book service, if the Prayer-book is to be retained at all; or shorter sermons and shorter prayers, and all very practical and up to date. What the war has not done is to be accomplished, 'as soon as the men come back,' by a radical reformation of our present *form of worship*.

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And yet the very men who propose this reformation do not believe in it. How could they believe in it? Has it been recorded in all the history of the world that a reformation of religion took place through changing the forms of public worship? These forms are the expression of religious life. Change the life, waken the dead into life, and it will find its own forms of expression. But to expect a revival of religion by curtailing the sermon or the prayers is to expect a new lease of life by changing out of a frock-coat into a jacket.

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Religion is at a low ebb among us because we are playing with it. We are playing with it; we are not practising it. We know that without morality religion is nothing, a mere pretence before men, a foolish mockery in the face of God. We profess

astonishment and bitter disappointment that the services of God's House are so unattractive—though we try so hard to make them attractive. We know of course that nothing that we can do will give new life to religion, or new interest in religious exercises. It is the Spirit of God that must do it. And all the while we are making it impossible for God to do anything for us. We are trying to ascend into the hill of the Lord, we are trying to stand in His holy place, *without clean hands*.

'Hear the word of the LORD, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah.

'To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats.

'When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts?

'Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting.

'Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them.

'And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood.'

'Your hands are full of blood.' We have been often told, and we all believe it, that the war would be ended sooner if we were to put an end to the selling of alcoholic drink. Well, let us say that by stopping the sale of alcohol we could put an end to the war just one day sooner. We open our morning newspaper. The first news we turn to is the list of the killed, wounded, and missing. Its daily average is three thousand or a little over. *The blood of these three thousand is on our hands.* And they are British only. There is also the daily French list, the Russian list, the Italian list, the

Roumanian list. Our hands are full of blood. Isaiah the prophet might have written his inescapable condemnation of you and me, of you and me by name; it fits us perfectly. Our hands are full of blood.

And what is this daily toll at the various war-fronts to the daily demand this sale makes at home? We listen to the occasional official reports and we pretend to be satisfied. But we know better. The local papers—the great dailies have no room, but the local papers are heart-rending reading in these days. This is yesterday's edition of one local paper. The father goes to the war. He leaves his work and his home. His wife gets her allowance from the War Office. She never had so much free cash in her hands before. She takes to drinking. A man is accepted as lodger—they could do without lodgers formerly. The woman and he live together. The daughter discovers the adultery. There is a divorce. That soldier returns to a ruined home. His children go out to the world dishonoured and ashamed. The mother, a well-doing woman till she took to drinking, becomes an abandoned wreck. Who profits by the transaction? Those only who have some interest in the sale of alcohol.

But do we mean to say that the Church of Christ can put an end to the sale of strong drink? That is what we mean to say. If the Church, or, let us say if you like, the Churches, in this land would resolve to do it, they could put an end to the sale of intoxicants within a week. The Prime Minister is ready. If the Government knew that the Christian people of the land were ready and determined they would not withstand them for a day.

And what would it be for the Church? If we were to speak for Scotland alone, we should say, without fear of contradiction, that the Church has not had such an opportunity in that land since the Reformation. We do not forget the Covenanting Struggle or the Ten Years' Conflict. But now the issue is greater. More persons are concerned

in it. They are concerned in it more radically. God has more interest in it. We want a revival of religion. We are actually praying for it. Yet many of us are doing nothing that is worth speaking about to put an end to this sale. Cleanse your hands, ye praying sinners. Not till then will the revival come.

Why are we doing so little to bring this traffic to an end? Well, some of us are interested in it. As the Chief Magistrate of a northern city said naively to a deputation, 'You must remember that a great many private persons have an interest in the drink trade.' Then some of us are self-indulgent. We are Christians of a sort, and we do not see the absurdity of belonging to this wholly new type of Christianity—the Christianity of the self-indulgent. And last of all we have too little imagination.

We have too little imagination. One night a man whom we know was on his way home. It was late—about the time when in those days the public-houses closed. He noticed two children standing at the mouth of a close. When he asked them what they were doing there at that time of night, their answer was, 'We are waiting to see if our father is owre drunk to lick us.'

Our friend was well-meaning. He was a moderate drinker certainly, and had even repeated on occasion the jovial remark that the most in-

temperate people he knew were the temperance people. He was a well-meaning man without much imagination. But that sight arrested him. Those little girls were waiting to see if they could go to bed without the fear of a half-drunk father letting loose his maddened temper upon them. They were praying to God, in their own way, that He would not let their father out of the public-house until he was helplessly drunk.

Some time ago Lord Rosebery told us that if the country did not throttle the drink traffic, the drink traffic would throttle the country. Has the war come to give it its opportunity? There are those who think so. We do not ourselves believe it for a moment. But one thing is certain. If the Church of God in this land does not throttle the drink traffic, the drink traffic will throttle the Church. And there is little time to lose. We believe that the drink traffic will be throttled. God's in His heaven: we cannot believe that He should send this great nation down to the company of the extinct nations of the earth while yet it has so great a work to do for righteousness. But how will it be if the nation is saved by others? How if it is saved by the shipbuilders on the Clyde? 'For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?'

## Notes of Recent Exposition.

RECENT events have led men to cast doubt on the worth of the specialist. The doubt will pass with the events. The Rev. A. Lukyn WILLIAMS, D.D., Canon of Ely, is a specialist. He has given a long life (Bishop Chase speaks of 'a friendship which is "hastening to fulfil" its fortieth year') to the study of Christianity in its relation to the Jews. The field is limited, and he has mastered

it. He was chosen to deliver twelve lectures before the Honourable Society of Lincoln's Inn on the Foundation of Bishop Warburton. He chose as the subject of lecture *The Hebrew-Christian Messiah* (S.P.C.K.; 10s. 6d. net).

By 'the Hebrew-Christian Messiah' Dr. Lukyn WILLIAMS means 'the presentation of the Messiah