

A MAGAZINE TO ENCOURAGE THE STUDY OF THE SCRIPTURES,
THE PRACTICE OF NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH PRINCIPLES
AND INTEREST IN GOSPEL WORK

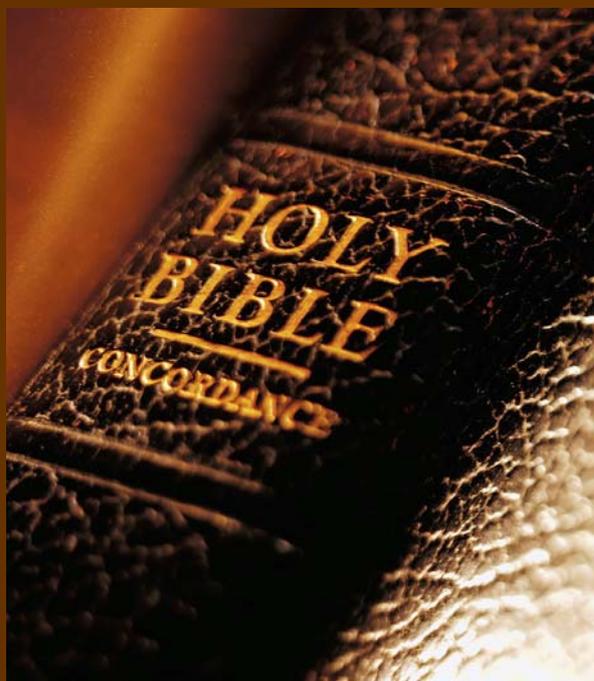
Precious SEED

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‘And they continued stedfastly’, Acts 2. 42.

These are simple but profound words. In the earliest days of church history there was a devotion and commitment to spiritual things that was remarkable. It is evident in the oft-repeated word ‘continued’ or similar, Acts 1. 14; 2. 42, 46. It was as if these early Christians had forsaken every thing else.

There was a constant desire to be instructed in the apostles’ doctrine—a thirst for the word of God. They yearned for the fellowship of fellow believers, with whom they sought to share not only the simple provision for bodily welfare but also that faith which united them in Christ. There was an eagerness for those periods of worship and prayer expressed in the breaking of bread and the prayer meeting.

Do we appreciate the challenge of these things? There was such freshness and enthusiasm for the things of God in those times. Is that true in our assembly today? Do we long to get away from the associations of our daily toil and routine and back into the presence of fellow saints? Do we yearn for the times when we can come collectively into the presence of God in worship and prayer?

Perhaps if we could rekindle the fire of first love in our own hearts we could effect something significant in the assembly to which we belong.

John Bennett
Ministry Articles Editor

Philip Henry Gosse (Part 3)

Naturalist, Environmentalist, and Christian—'An Honest Hodman of Science'

Brian Clatworthy, Newton Abbot, England



The birth of his only child Edmund in 1849, did little to change Henry Gosse's methodical approach to life. Of this event, he recorded in his diary that, 'E. delivered of a son. Received green swallow from Jamaica'. EDMUND GOSSE later wrote that this did not suggest that his father was as much interested in the bird as in the boy, but what the wording exemplified was his father's extreme observance of etiquette. The earlier visitor was recorded first.¹ With a family to support, Henry's written output on natural history increased exponentially. The modern idea of the pot-boiler book was, in fact, very much embraced by Henry Gosse as he attempted to make the world of natural history come alive to his readership through the exciting way in which he described his findings. He was also a very gifted illustrator, and the illustration from his book on *British Sea-Anemones and Corals*, first published in 1860, shows just how these remarkable pictures helped to enhance his writings, and popularize them to a very interested Victorian public.

His prolific output at this time, however, led to overwork, and as a consequence, his health deteriorated. EDMUND GOSSE suggests that this was acute nervous dyspepsia.² Whilst this was not a particularly serious complaint, nonetheless, on medical advice, he moved out of London in 1852. He initially moved to St Marychurch in Torquay, then, later in the year, to Ilfracombe. The Devon seashore provided him with a unique opportunity to examine and experiment with sea creatures of all kinds at close hand. Edmund, who was now three years old, accompanied his enthusiastic father on his various field trips. ANN THWAITE gives us an interesting insight between father and son when she writes that 'Edmund is constantly there, both in the letters and in the books. It is the child ('our own little treasured one') whom Gosse guards as they climb the cliff paths on Capstone Hill above Ilfracombe; who enjoys eating sea-anemones ('and loudly demanded more, like another *Oliver Twist*'), who pulls the petals off the wayside flowers and shouts as the tide comes in over his shoes'.³ This picture suggests a much

more endearing relationship between father and son than is often portrayed, even by Edmund himself. ROY COAD, in an aside, states that ‘even Edmund Gosse enjoyed the companionship and love of his eccentric but noble father to an extent which thousands would envy’.⁴

It was during this period of recuperation that Henry wrote his next book entitled *A Naturalist’s Rambles on the Devonshire Coast*, which, again, captured the imagination of his Victorian readership. Some suggest that this book was partly responsible for the sea-shore craze of the mid-Victorian period.⁵ It was in an appendix to this book that Gosse introduced his own marine aquarium to the Victorian public.⁶ At the same time, his deep interest in the nation of Israel came to the fore when he wrote his *History of the Jews, from the Christian Era to the Dawn of the Reformation*. The book runs to more than 300 pages and is a unique narrative of Israel’s failure over many centuries to please God. He concludes the narrative by stating, among other things, that ‘The history of the chosen people is calculated to teach us some important lessons. Prominent on its pages, written in characters so plain that he who runs may read, is the solemn truth that “man at his best estate is altogether vanity”’.⁷ Emily too was busy, not only caring for her young son, but producing her most important contribution to Christian literature with a book entitled *Abraham and his Children*. The book was sub-titled, ‘or parental duties illustrated by Scriptural examples’, and provided a set of objective lessons using biblical characters to illustrate how parents should bring up children. The enduring appeal of this book is reflected in the fact that up until quite recently it was still being sold by a number of on-line booksellers.

Henry’s work started to gain academic recognition when he was elected to an Associate of the Linnaean Society in March 1848. This is currently the oldest active biological society in the world, and, according to its website, continues to play a central role in documenting the world’s flora and fauna, and providing important data for biodiversity conservation. Gosse’s greatest acclaim came, however, some six years later when he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1856. This was an incredible achievement when one considers that Gosse was effectively a self-taught field naturalist with no academic training. But his

triumph had been overshadowed a few months earlier by the tragic news that Emily had contracted breast cancer. The news came as a hammer blow to Henry, and, despite Emily undergoing a radical form of new treatment for the disease that avoided surgery, she succumbed to the illness and willingly entered the presence of her Lord on the 10 February 1857. She was only 51 years of age, and although she had been married to Henry for less than 9 years, she exemplified all the characteristics summarized in Proverbs chapter 31 of a virtuous wife. She endured intense suffering throughout this ordeal, but had remained calmly serene in the knowledge of the love of God in Christ. ANNA SHIPTON, who was an eye-witness of Emily’s sufferings, records these poignant words, ‘While alluding to her suffering, she said, “I am being pruned and purged; you will not think I am making much of myself when I say, that it is that I may bring forth *much fruit*”’.⁸ Henry’s reaction at this time sums up Emily’s absolute faith in her risen Saviour, ‘To me the prospect was dark indeed; but to her death had no terrors’. Emily’s last words to Henry were reputed to be, ‘I shall walk with Him in white. Won’t you take our lamb and walk with me?’ Thus ended the earthly life of a remarkable saint of God.

In our next article we will see how Henry coped as a single parent, and the conflict that he was embroiled in as a result of his challenge to Darwin’s theory of evolution.

Endnotes:

1. GOSSE, EDMUND, *Father and Son*, Penguin Modern Classics, pg. 20.
2. *Op Cit.*, pg. 14.
3. *Glimpses of the Wonderful – The Life of Philip Henry Gosse*. pg. 172.
4. *A History of the Brethren Movement*, pg. 180.
5. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.
6. Gosse later designed the first public aquarium that opened in Regent’s Park in May 1853. His later book *The Aquarium* triggered a second craze to sweep through Victorian society (*Oxford Dictionary of National Biographical*).
7. *History of the Jews, from the Christian Era to the Dawn of the Reformation*, pg. 312.
8. *Tell Jesus Recollections of Emily Gosse*, pg. 73.
9. *Op cit.*, pg. 76.
10. *Glimpses of the Wonderful – The Life of Philip Henry Gosse*. pg. 203.

Their Finest Hour – Ruth

Ken Totton, Cambridge, England

Introduction

'Ruth the Moabitess', as she is frequently designated in the book that bears her name, is deservedly one of the most celebrated women of the Bible. Through faith, loyalty, and labour, in the providence of God she becomes an ancestor of David the king, and, therefore, of Jesus Christ.¹

Redemption is the great theme of the book, and what wonderful insights we can discern of the redeeming ways of God! Naomi's fortunes are gradually transformed from desolation to the fullness of blessing.² On a human level, the key to the restoration of Naomi, the Israelite, is Ruth the Gentile.³ The book also emphasizes the sovereignty and covenantal loyalty of God, notwithstanding troubled times and the absence of prophetic messages. Amidst the frequent anarchy of the period of the Judges, God is at work towards the establishment of monarchy through David and his dynasty.

For those who love the literary structures of the Bible, there are beautiful symmetries to observe in the book. Orpah's mere amiability and return to Moab highlights the thoroughgoing loyalty and devotion of Ruth to God and to Naomi. Similarly, in chapter 4 the selfish concerns of the 'nearer kinsman' serve to accentuate the selfless generosity of Boaz in redeeming the inheritance and marrying Ruth. We marvel at the narrator's artistic skill, as the action moves from the tragedy and desolation of Moab to the joyful birth of the child Obed. What progressive hopes are awakened along the way!

Ruth deciding

Ruth is first mentioned in connection with the sorrows of a family under the discipline of God in Moab. The loss of Elimelech, and a childless marriage, is then followed by the tragic death of her husband Mahlon, 1. 5. Yet, amidst all the heartache and death, the living God is at work. Ruth comes to exercise faith in the God of Israel. Sometimes we have to lose things held dear in order to gain the more important things in life.

On the road to Bethlehem, and faced with the realistic promptings of Naomi to return to Moab with prospects

of remarriage and physical security, Ruth makes her famous declaration, Ruth 1. 16-17, 'And Ruth said, In-treat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me'.

She commits herself selflessly and unreservedly to her mother-in-law, but also to 'the Lord'. Commitment to God also commits us to the people of God.

By faith she is forsaking Moab, the land of her birth, and committing herself to Israel's God, renouncing all prospect of marriage to devote herself to the maintenance of her mother-in-law, Naomi. Her step of faith compares favourably with that of the illustrious Abraham, because she has no comparable promise.⁴

God honours such robust faith. Naomi can only see despair, and the heavy hand of God in her life; little does she appreciate what a treasure she has in Ruth as they make their way to Bethlehem.

Ruth working



Having responded to the report that the Lord had visited his people in giving them bread, what a happy providence that they should arrive at Bethlehem right at the start of barley harvest!

Unprompted by Naomi, Ruth sees an opportunity to support her mother-in-law by the demanding work of gleaning.⁵ Respectfully, however, she first puts the plan

to Naomi for her approval. She shows further respect in not presuming on the right to glean in the field. 'Her hap was to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz, who was of the kindred of Elimelech', 2. 3, showing that our sovereign God is in control of our lives – even the place where we work. Chapter 2 introduces us to the key figure of Boaz, who graciously offers Ruth the right to glean, protection, and water. Moreover, not only can she quench her thirst, but she is invited to his table. And so Ruth faithfully and vigorously works to feed both herself and her mother-in-law.

Ruth requesting

Chapter 3 brings us to the dramatic centre of the book and, in my opinion, Ruth's 'finest hour'. Ruth's earlier plan to obtain food is now matched by Naomi's plan to secure rest for Ruth by marriage to Boaz. With acute womanly intuition Naomi has noted the admiration that Boaz had expressed for Ruth, and the way he had been the channel for the display of the loving kindness of God in protecting Ruth and providing for them both. Naomi's thinking is dominated by 'the man' – Boaz,⁶ the potential redeemer. Accordingly, in the confidence of faith she instructs Ruth to present herself at the threshing floor of Boaz and request him to marry her. This bold strategy is not without significant risk, for if Ruth is seen with Boaz at the floor, some Bethlehemites would put the worst possible construction on their meeting, 3. 14.

Naomi's plan tells us something important about the realization of the purposes of God. Believers are not to sit back passively expecting good outcomes to happen automatically. Rather, they must learn to sense the providential leading of God and embrace opportunities in faith.

Ruth displays many admirable qualities. She pledges complete obedience, both to the letter and the spirit of Naomi's instruction, 3. 5, 9. Washed, anointed, and dressed for Boaz, and in anticipation of a new era of her life, she courageously but discreetly goes to the threshing floor. There are matters in spiritual life where the utmost discretion is required, and here is one of them. By going to Boaz privately Ruth shows respect; should Boaz be unable or unwilling to fulfil the role of redeemer, then there will be no damage to the reputation of either party. She requests Boaz to act symbolically in accordance with an ancient custom. By spreading his garment over Ruth he is pledging that he will offer her the protection of marriage. God himself said to Israel, 'And I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, and behold, thy time was the time of love; and I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness; and I swore unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord Jehovah, and thou becamest mine', Ezek. 16. 8.

The Hebrew word for 'skirt' is translated 'wing', 2. 12, suggesting that Boaz is to become for Ruth the mediator of the love, care, and protection that God Himself affords. He becomes the answer to his own prayer!⁷ Godly people do not need long lists of rules in order to know how to respond in new situations. For Boaz, God's covenant love and loyalty to Israel is sufficient to guide his behaviour. Similarly, for us the gospel should not be mere creedal propositions, but should mould our values and direct our behaviour.

Purity and virtue characterize this delicate night scene –

nothing less than we would expect, knowing the characters of both Boaz and Ruth. They are two of a kind, for the single adjective translated 'worthy', ESV, serves to describe them both, 2. 1; 3. 11b. Following the celebrations marking the completion of harvest, Boaz is sleeping at the threshing floor in order to guard the precious grain. The removal of the covering of his feet made him awake. Ruth identifies herself and then makes her momentous request, v. 9.

What selflessness she demonstrates in being prepared to be married to an older man in order that the family inheritance might be restored! This devotion immediately appeals to Boaz; this kindness⁸ exceeds her earlier display of kindness to the mother-in-law, 2. 11. Her obedient pledge of verse 5 is rewarded by Boaz' commitment to her. Whilst her entry into the rest provided by marriage still awaits, chapter 4, she can enter into rest, based on the faithful word of her beloved.⁹

Is there not a crying need for young people like Ruth today? The precious heritage of biblical truth and teaching cherished by generations is often despised and discounted. We need young people of deep spirituality who will refuse to run after those of their own age and, instead, devote themselves to the support of older believers, in order that the worthy name of Christ be restored upon His inheritance. Ruth readily accepted marriage to the elder Boaz in order that an heir might be born. God is no man's debtor; she is named in the genealogy of Messiah. Ruth's distinctive loving-kindness can also be traced in the character and actions of her offspring David. It finds its ultimate, perfect, and eternal expression in 'great David's greater son', our Lord Jesus.¹⁰

Endnotes:

1. Matt 1. 5
2. Compare Ruth 1. 1-5 with 4. 13-17.
3. This is a beautiful prophetic prototype of the restoration of Israel. Gentile inclusion in divine purpose will lead to the eventual salvation of 'all Israel', Rom. 9-11.
4. Ct. Gen. 12. 1-3.
5. God in His compassion commanded farmers in Israel not to harvest the corners of their fields so that the poor and needy, such as aliens, widows, and orphans, could glean enough food to live, Lev. 19. 9-10; 23. 22.
6. Note the expression 'the man' 3. 3, 8, 16, 18.
7. Ruth 2. 12
8. Kindness, covenant loyalty, mercy (Heb. *khesed*) is a keyword of the book, 1. 8, 2. 20. It is characteristic of God Himself, 2. 20; 2 Chr. 7. 6; Ps. 17. 7, Lam. 3. 22, but also demonstrated by Ruth, Naomi and Boaz.
9. Similarly, the believer has already entered into the rest through faith, Heb. 4. 3; on the other hand, the eternal sabbatic rest awaits the future consummation, 4. 9.
10. 2 Cor. 8. 9; Titus 3. 4-7.

'Thou hast had five husbands', John 4. 18

Barry Bennett, Mansfield, England

When the Lord Jesus arrived at Samaria, John 4, wearied with His journey He sat down upon the well and began a discourse with a woman of Samaria, who had come to draw water. During this discourse the Lord said to her, 'Go, call thy husband', v. 16, to which she replied 'I have no husband', v. 17. The Lord then said to her, 'Thou hast well said, I have no husband: for **thou hast had five husbands**'. To better appreciate the significance of these words we might note the origin and religious leadership of the Samaritans.

Following the depopulation of Samaria after the Assyrian captivity, we read that the King of Assyria brought men from Babylon, Cuthah, Ava, Hamath and Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria, 2 Kgs. 17. 24. Five separate nations were dwelling in Samaria. In verse 29 we read, 'Howbeit every nation made gods of their own, and placed them in the houses of the high places which the Samaritans had made, every nation in their cities wherein they dwelt'. Five idolatrous nations with their gods now occupied Samaria.

When the Lord Jesus came to Samaria those same **five** idolatries would still be there. It has been a changeless feature of heathendom that men have worshiped the same deities as their fathers through millennia. In contrast, it is noteworthy that the Antichrist will suppress all religions in a coming day, 'Neither shall he regard the God of his fathers', Dan. 11. 37.

In the light of the prevailing conditions in Samaria, it would appear that the woman of Samaria now stands before the Lord not just as one needing grace but she is seen as a representative of the nation's leadership. Her lower domestic life, having had five husbands, is symptomatic of the nation's five idolatries. One of the characteristics of idolatry is licentiousness and promiscuity. How can she rise to a higher moral standard, having such influences around her? It is impossible!

Does this have a lesson for our nation? With successive governments and leaders in the religious institutions allowing more liberal policies, is it any wonder that the nation's morality is rapidly declining? The word of God no longer has a place in the nation's legislation. Religious leaders are denying the most precious truths and doctrines contained in the word of God, and the masses are eagerly accepting and following their example.

We don't know the full effect of the Lord's presence and words upon the woman of Samaria, but after the briefest encounter with the Lord Jesus she left her water pot, the source of her earthy satisfaction, and went and testified to the men in the city, 'Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?' John 4. 29. That was greater refreshment to the Lord Jesus than all the water in Jacob's well. But there is more, for in verse 39 we read, 'and many of the Samaritans of that city believed on him for the saying of the woman'.

Only the gospel can change lives, and lift men and women above the moral and spiritual influences around them. Neither education nor legislation has the power to elevate people. At the moment we have liberty and freedom to read God's word publicly, and to preach the gospel. May the Lord grant that this continues till He returns, and may the Lord give us grace to resist the powerful influence of the nation's amoral leadership and continue to preach.



Sons, Salt, and She-Bears

Ross Rainey, Plymouth, USA

Someone has said, 'God buries His workmen, but continues His work'. Yet, how difficult it is for many of God's people to accept the fact that it is His will that leaders of His work should not remain indefinitely!

Sons of the Prophets, 2 Kgs. 2. 15-18

The sons of the prophets readily acknowledged Elisha, v. 15, and from this point on they are seen in close fellowship with the prophet, for they belonged to the faithful remnant in Israel. Nevertheless, they were marked by an element of unbelief. Not having actually seen Elijah's translation, they did not believe that he had been caught up into heaven by a whirlwind, v. 1. Somehow, they thought that the Holy Spirit might have transported the prophet to some remote part of the area. Refusing to obey Elisha's command, v. 16, they were unrelenting in their urge to send out a search party, until finally the harassed prophet no longer had the heart to refuse. Fifty men were sent out and returned after a three-day unsuccessful search. It was now their turn to be em-barrassed, although in a different way than Elisha had been. Like the disciples of the Lord Jesus, the sons of the prophets were 'slow to believe'.

Following Elijah's translation, Elisha miraculously crossed the Jordan River and went to Jericho. This 'city of palm trees', some 825 feet below the level of the Mediterranean Sea, is one of the oldest cities in the world.

Salt, 2 Kgs. 2. 19-22

Though the city surroundings of Jericho were pleasant (just as the world is an extremely attractive place in so many ways), the water was bad and the ground barren.

Elisha asked for a new jar with salt in it, whereupon he put the salt in the polluted waters of the spring. God's miracle through Elisha was a symbol of the prophet's mission to Israel. Like the waters of Jericho, the life of the nation was polluted. He, by the word of God, had come to purify it.

She Bears, 2 Kgs. 2. 23-25

Few accounts in the Bible have been more misunderstood than this one, thanks to the rendering 'little children', v. 23 KJV. The phrase 'little children' should be correctly translated 'youths', 'young lads', or 'young men', the

Hebrew word in the singular being used of Joseph at 17.

Bethel was the home of Jeroboam's 'calf', and also of a group of the sons of the prophets who looked to Elijah as master. As a result, there must have been quite a religious tension at Bethel, and it would seem likely that it was by deliberate design that these youths mocked and taunted Elisha. What they said was not just childish rudeness. Rather, it is evident that there was an especially insulting point to the phrase 'bald head', a bald or shaven head being the mark of a leper, and denoting disgrace. The expression was intended as a sneer at Elisha as God's servant. By saying, 'Go up, thou bald head', they were scoffing at Elijah's translation, taunting Elisha to go up just as Elijah had. In ridiculing Elisha, the man of God, they were guilty of blaspheming the God he represented.

The parents, who had possibly prompted the youths, would, by Hebrew standards, be the worst sufferers. Some Bible critics have declared the punishment 'disproportionate to the offence', but, note, the passage does not say that the she-bears killed the young men. The Hebrew word for 'tare' does not mean kill or destroy.

Even today, sometimes judgement comes quickly on those who reject God, and who despise His servants. However, it is not for us to call down a curse on any who oppose and reject the truth, although present day mockers and rejecters of the gospel of God's grace will eventually receive just punishment if they do not repent of their sins and believe.

What are some of the lessons in this account?

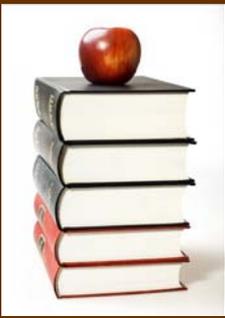


1. In connection with the sons of the prophets, let us remember the words of one, 'Lord, I believe; help thou my unbelief', Mark 9. 24.

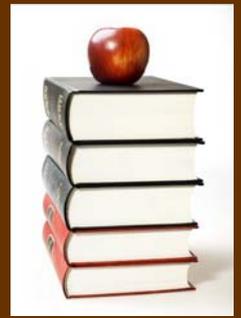
2. With the miracle of

the healing of the waters, let us remember Jehovah-Ropheka, Exod. 15. 26. It is the Lord who heals from the consequences of sin.

3. Let us seek to respect the Lord's servants.



Book Review



Christian Legal Handbook

Various authors

Paperback, 25pp. Published by John Ritchie Ltd, 40 Beansburn, Kilmarnock, Scotland.

ISBN 978-1-907731-85-3

This handbook is a folder in which various materials can be placed, its intention being, as the subtitle suggests, to provide 'Guidelines to enable collective companies of Christians to understand the standard of compliance required to operate within the law'. Although this folder and its contents are relatively thin at the moment, it is good to see two key areas being covered – Open Air Preaching and Food Safety.

It is in the section dealing with open air preaching that the authors indicate the appropriateness of such a handbook, 'While scripture enjoins believers to be subject to the authorities (Romans 13:1), it also shows us that it is appropriate for believers to assert their legal rights so as to protect themselves from harm or to protect their right to preach without interference'. Reference is made to Acts chapter 22 verses 25-30 and chapter 25 verses 10-11 in this context.

Equally, in an increasingly litigious society it is becoming all the more important for Christians to be aware of what the law states and how we can operate within it. If we provide food for those who attend our meetings, it is essential that appropriate measures are in place to ensure that it is safe to eat, and that no infection, however minor, might be passed on. If we are seeking to present the gospel through open air preaching in our communities, it is important that we are sensitive to those who we might disturb and sensible in our presentation of the truth of God. Whilst we recognize that the scriptures can offend, it is important that we, as its preachers, do not communicate it in a way that detracts from its message to sinners or that brings that message into conflict with the law of the land.

Whilst some may consider the presentation of case law and a discussion of its implications outside the remit of elders within local churches, all should see the practical considerations and advice as both timely and helpful. The authors, Alan Summers QC, Mark Cooper, and Yvonne Gilliland LL.B, are all suitably qualified to offer the advice and guidance, and are to be thanked for their efforts in putting this first batch of material together. The publishers indicate that 'It is proposed to release further additions to the series'. They are to be thanked for their efforts to enable all of us to be as 'wise as serpents, and harmless as doves', Matt. 10. 16. This handbook is highly commended.

