

THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

Notes of Recent Exposition.

IN *Time and Tide* of 17th August, C. S. LEWIS has an interesting and suggestive note on Chivalry. He seeks to distinguish and isolate that particular conception of the man *comme il faut* which was the special contribution, so he avers, of the Middle Ages to our culture. He begins happily by quoting from Malory the tribute to the dead Launcelot: 'Thou wert the meekest man that ever ate in hall among ladies; and thou wert the sternest knight to thy mortal foe that ever put spear in rest.' And he asks us to observe the relevance of this double demand on human nature, of this paradoxical ideal of meekness and sternness, to the modern world.

The perpetuation of the chivalrous tradition he regards as the one hope of our modern world. If it is not possible to multiply men who combine the two sides of Launcelot's character—meekness with sternness, humility and forbearance with valour—then all talk of lasting happiness or dignity for human society is 'pure moonshine.' And the chivalrous sentiment suffers among us from two opposite reactions or tendencies. One is to scout it as part of the false glamour of war. The other is to scout it as weak and really unheroic. 'These two tendencies between them weave the world's shroud.'

But 'happily,' it is added, 'we live better than we write, better than we deserve. Launcelot is not yet irrecoverable.' We have discovered since this war began that, on the one hand, the heroic virtues are still unimpaired in the younger generation, and,

on the other hand, along with sternness there is much meekness: 'from all I hear, the young pilots in the R.A.F. (to whom we owe our life from hour to hour) are not less, but more, urbane and modest than the 1915 model.'

While, then, there is still life in the chivalrous tradition that has come to us from the Middle Ages, how is that life to be maintained? The answer offered to us is this. We must cherish the knowledge that the knightly character is a work not of Nature but of art; 'of that art which has human beings, instead of canvas or marble, for its medium.' And we must do more than cherish this knowledge. But as to what in his opinion that more is, the writer of the note does not enlighten us.

However, we are grateful to him for his reminder of the value of the chivalrous sentiment and of the necessity of its perpetuation. In describing the knightly character as a work of art he supplies a hint to the Christian expositor. It should be remembered that the ideal of chivalry was conceived under the auspices of the Christian Church. In riding abroad upon his adventures the ideal knight was at once redressing human wrong and upholding the Christ. Thus the knightly character might be described as blended of Nature and grace, the artist being God, Nature His material, and grace His instrument.

But as there is no specialized class among us—as

in previous centuries—to keep alive the vestiges of chivalry, how is the people to be saved from the extremes of brutality and softness, ferocity and cowardice? Here again the Christian expositor might add a word.

It is for the Christian Church to vindicate and assert in a classless society the ideal of mediæval chivalry. True it is that some among us, even in face of the present wrong and aggression, advocate the martyr-spirit of the Early Church. But most of those who bear Christ's name advocate a more natural kind of realism. It is not regarded as of the divine intention that grace should drive out Nature. In the battle for righteousness, whether waged with arms or without them, grace and Nature should be blended together, so that meekness may not become soft and cowardly nor sternness brutal and fierce. Yet both meekness and sternness are needed if the Kingdom of God is to be advanced.

It must be added, in case of misunderstanding, that only in the last resort does Christian chivalry take up arms. Evelyn Underhill has truly said that 'the real victories of the Spirit are seldom won on battlefields, and a religious revival inspired by the practical needs of the present moment, though it might have many Old Testament or even Moslem characteristics, would be something less than Christian.'

The world crisis of to-day calls for hard, sustained and revolutionary thinking. To none does this call come with more urgency than to Christian people. A new age is dawning and much that is old and venerable is doomed to pass away. We must be ready to re-examine the articles of our creed and see that the foundations of our faith are firm. We must strive to bring the social order into closer harmony with the will of Christ and be ready to welcome any change in that direction however drastic.

To this end we must have food for thought and stimulus to our minds. It is, therefore, all to the good that there should be issued a series of

'Christian News-Letters' and 'News-Letter Books' whose design is to 'assist thought upon the relation of the Christian faith to present problems.' But such writing to be of value must be constructive and not merely critical, sane and practical rather than denunciatory. It must not follow the method of the party politician who, having denounced the whole policy of his opponents, offers no policy of his own except in high-sounding words about justice, freedom, and equality which ignore practical difficulties and lead us nowhere.

This criticism is suggested by reading the most recent issue of this series, *Christianity and the Machine Age*, by Mr. Eric GILL (Sheldon Press; rs. 6d. net). It is written with intense vigour and conviction. It is highly stimulating and provocative. But it is too dogmatic and indeed oracular, every sentence being promoted to the dignity of a paragraph. And it is altogether one-sided.

The author begins by asking 'What is Christianity?' His answer is, 'Christianity is the religion of poverty. . . . Whatever may be said about Christianity in other respects, this at least is clear, crystal clear, clear as the stars: Christianity is the religion which blesses poverty and blesses the poor.' Again, 'It is the blessing of poverty which is the central fact of Christian sociology.' Now it is one thing to say, as Jesus did, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit (or the poor), for theirs is the kingdom of heaven,' and quite another thing to say, 'Blessed be poverty.' Jesus gave solemn warning of the spiritual dangers accompanying the possession of riches, but He never remotely suggested that His disciples should sit down in a loincloth and spin like Gandhi. Yet this is what the present writer means, if he means anything at all.

Having thus defined Christianity as the religion of poverty he launches out into a fierce attack on 'capitalist-industrialism.' He includes in the sweep of his denunciations all machinery and all machine-made things. His criticism frankly becomes a caricature. 'Machines of their very nature are, and must always be, comic—*i.e.* laughable, absurd, ludicrous . . . the locomotive is a comic version of

the dray horse.' In other words, to put a yoke upon the neck of a noble animal and from the wild freedom of the prairie to reduce it to the drudgery of a dray horse is beautiful, but to harness fire and the power of steam to man's use is ridiculous and wrong! It is not simply the abuses of the system which are here denounced, such as the prevalence of the gain motive, the undue acquisition of wealth, monotony of labour, the prostitution of scientific discoveries to destructive ends. The whole system is declared to be sub-human, despicable, and degrading, and altogether incompatible with Christianity.

Christian thinkers are not called to be defenders of 'capitalist-industrialism' or admirers of 'the machine age,' but they are required to be fair-minded in their criticisms and to preserve some historical perspective. It is not too much to say that the human race has lived by its inventiveness, by brain work far more than by hand work, by subduing Nature and harnessing its powers to his service. If man is now called to turn back upon his tracks the question rises, how far back is he to go? Is he to dispense with all machinery and return to the primitive state? But even the primitives have their machinery—the plough and the loom, the canoe and the fishing net. Stewart of Lovedale used to point out that the common spade was an instrument requiring skill for its handling as anyone could find out by putting it into the hands of a raw native.

It is easy to picture the world before the machine age as a happy Arcady where every worker was an artist rejoicing in the work of his own hands, but such pictures are entirely fanciful. Life in those days was exceedingly bare and hard; the mass of the common people lived in drudgery or actual slavery. It may be argued that without the invention of machinery to lighten labour human slavery might not yet have been abolished. This argument, however, would have no weight with the present writer who seems to think that things could not possibly be worse than they are in our time. 'For the main idea of Capitalism being what it is (the profit motive), and its instruments being what they are, the development of its method has been more damaging

to the human spirit and to the expression of that spirit in human works than any slavery of the past.'

Our age is commonly dubbed 'the Acquisitive Age' and condemned as such, but man has in fact always been an acquisitive creature. Doubtless in our time he has found means for acquiring things on a bigger scale than formerly, but he has always had the hunger to acquire. His spirit in this respect has not changed or deteriorated in modern days. Even in Bible times we read of the miser hiding his treasure and the rich fool building ever bigger barns to hold his surplus crop, and we hear bitter curses pronounced upon those who add field to field and who withhold their corn from the people in time of famine. It is, to say the least, doubtful if our Lord would have seen any greater sin in the more complex exploitations of to-day. There is the same state of mind, the same sinful lust to possess in the one case as in the other. And nothing in the teaching of Jesus is clearer than this, that He had regard not so much to the magnitude of the outward act but primarily to the inward disposition and state of the heart. We may take it then that His judgment would be that the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the Word in our acquisitive age as in all times past.

We do not know to what extent the writer of this book suffers himself to be entangled in the 'sub-human and degrading' machinery of this age. It is evident that he has made use of the 'despicable' machinery of the printing press to broadcast his views. One would venture to suggest that he ought in consistency to restrict himself to a garment of camel's hair with a girdle of skin about his loins and a diet of locusts and wild honey. But in all seriousness we must enter a protest against identifying our Christian faith with these wild diatribes against our age. We believe our faith to be reasonable and such as can commend itself to thoughtful men. Heat is no substitute for light, and surely this bewildered and tortured world needs above all things light and guidance, healing and help rather than shattering denunciation. Christ is the light of the world and He came not to condemn the world but that the world through Him might be saved.