

THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

Notes of Recent Exposition.

THERE can be no doubt that the present turmoil in the world is acting as a stimulus to Christian thought. When the fountains of the great deep are broken up and men are struggling desperately in its broken waters, it is inevitable that the Christian man should take deeper soundings than usual, and lay hold with firmer grasp on that hope which is the anchor of his soul.

As the mighty empire of Rome began to totter to its fall, a fall which must have seemed to many to be the end of all things, St. Augustine wrote his 'City of God' in which he pointed Christian eyes away from 'eternal' Rome to that city with foundations which is truly eternal in the heavens. Would that some modern Augustine might arise and do a like service to the Church to-day, showing what the Church really is in its divine essence and in its relation to the world, and guiding Christians how they ought to think and act as those whose citizenship is in heaven.

Failing this, help and guidance must come in other ways. Just as the progress of modern science is advanced more by the collaboration of many workers than by a single work of genius, so we may hope that by manifold contributions in Christian writings and discussions we may reach a common Christian mind in regard to the problems of our time and find the sure path which the Church should follow.

One such contribution has come to hand which can be warmly commended. It is entitled *City of God*, by Mr. R. A. EDWARDS (S.C.M. ; 5s. net). It is written in a style which is vivacious and interesting, by one who is an ardent lover of the Church, who, though he sees its failings and laments its divisions, yet firmly believes in its divine character and mission, and who strives to set it forth before men's eyes in strong contrast to the world as the heavenly ideal on which to set our hopes.

The Christian Church presents itself as a standing challenge to our thought. It is something that cannot in honesty be ignored but demands the most serious consideration. The fact is that everything that we value in our modern civilization is where it is to-day because through centuries of astonishing difficulty its germ was protected by the Church. 'Children are not educated in spite of the Church, but because of it. The freedom of the individual is not something that a tyrannical Church would have crushed had it not been rescued by "the invincible spirit of man." The exact opposite is the truth. Modern Europe to-day presents the bewildering spectacle of nations who, having derided or disregarded the Church, hold out their wrists for fetters.' So with the healing of the sick and other forms of social service. In short, the world itself, and especially the most beneficent activities in it, cannot be understood unless serious regard be given to the phenomenon of the Church.

How has the Church come to be? We tend often to paint a wholly unreal picture of man as a religious being. 'We tend to think of him alone on some mountain-top confronting the immensity that is God. . . . A man may climb to the mountain-top to be alone with God, but the one thing he does not do is to stay there. He comes down from the mountain, not only because he is hungry, but so that he may share his experience with other people. The chief fact about man's religious story is not that he worshipped on mountain-tops, but that he built stone circles. The saint on top of his pillar, or the anchorite in his cave, is a pathetic monstrosity.' Whitehead's definition that 'religion is what a man does with his solitariness' has recently had considerable vogue, but it is dangerously one-sided. Let a man pursue his solitary path and he may end, mad as a hatter, on top of Simeon's pillar. When the plain Christian man of to-day expresses his religion by going to Church he is doing what man has always done in all ages, joining in fellowship for the worship of God. He is not doing something odd, but is giving expression to a fundamental human need. It may seem a far cry back to the stone circle, but 'start with the stone circle and you may find yourself with your fellow-men and women at the Lord's table.'

The idea of a religious society, then, is primitive, and it carries with it in embryo the cognate idea that if men are united with God in common bond they must also be united with one another. The law to 'love the Lord thy God' took with it the corresponding law to 'love thy neighbour as thyself.' Christianity therefore did not come into the world like a bolt from the blue, some errant meteor having no natural affinities with this earth of ours. On the contrary, it had its roots deep in the past. It was the conviction of those who first preached the gospel that in Christ the long sweep of the world's history came to its climax. 'If you start with the idea that the first Whitsunday was the birthday of the Christian Church, you are bound to get intellectually tangled and will have no certain reply to the suggestion that perhaps the Church was, after all, a great mistake. But fix your mind on the wide sweep of human history, see men and

women diligently making societies, see them looking for the perfect society that shall link the seen and the unseen, see the Jews taking hold of the idea and slowly working it out until they have solidly learnt that the society men want is indeed a divine thing, then see the Christian Church growing out of it, see tent-maker Paul crashing his way through the traditional barriers so that Christ's "other sheep not of this fold" can get within the sacred covenant-bounded society, and you are at least on the way towards understanding.'

But the Church does not present itself to the world as a merely natural human group. It claims to be divine in its origin and essence. However broken and divided it may be, and however imperfect its members, it has a unity and perfection in Christ who is its Head. In His name it makes a tremendous claim. 'It would not be quite satisfied with the definition that it is a divine society, for it would insist that it is *the* divine society, a fundamental part of God's creation, the one thing that does in fact indicate the significance of human life. It would say quite boldly to any man, "You are made so that you might be a churchman, and while you remain outside you will never be what God hoped you would be when He made you."'

How then does the Church stand in relation to the world? This has been throughout the Christian ages a very vexed question. Broadly speaking, the Church has at various times adopted three attitudes to the world. At the beginning it was a separate communistic society which lived as far as possible a separate life, taking as little to do with world affairs as possible. Confronted with such vast evils as militarism and slavery, it seems to be hardly conscious that these things exist. It takes little account of them. 'Are you called being a slave?' says St. Paul, 'Care not for it.' The implication is that the Christian can live under any worldly conditions, for the realities of his life and warfare are spiritual.

Then there came a period when the Church aimed

at being all-inclusive. It opened wide its doors and took in tribes and peoples without discrimination. It baptized them into the name of Christ while they were ignorant of the spirit of Christ. This baneful policy secularized the Church. If the Church in name conquered the world, the world in reality conquered the Church. To break this unholy bond and deliver the Church from this Babylonish captivity the protest of the Reformation was necessary. But it cannot be said to have been completely successful, for the idea still prevails that the world is, or at least ought to be, within the Church. Hence we have the third attitude adopted by the modern Church, which takes the line that the world can be Christianized by legislation, that this or that evil can be removed from the social system, and the fabric of human society moulded according to the Christian pattern. It ought to have been plain that this policy was bound to disappoint. Just as you do not make a Christian by moving a man from the slums, so you do not make a Christian State by compelling it to house its citizens decently.

Now the present crisis has brought again to the front in a new way the relation of the Church and the world. What has happened is that in the Totalitarian States, but not in them alone, the world is challenging the Church, and calling in question its right to dominate or influence the affairs of the world, or to interfere in any way whatsoever. The Church tried to 'control the State either by placing its nominees in key positions, legates, cardinals, chancellor-archbishops, Christian Prime Ministers, or by persuading the State to pass "Christian" legislation. The world found the whole business intolerable. It wanted to have its own kind of international, economic, or social life, and simply grew weary of a Church that was a thinly disguised rival. If the Church would tolerate war, multi-millionaires or divorce, well and good; but if not, the time had come when it would be told to mind its own business, to remember that the object of a sermon was to expound the Word of God in a manner that did not clash with public policy, and to fasten its attention upon the paradise

in heaven while the State chose the kind of paradise it wanted on earth.'

What must the Church do in this crisis? She must rediscover what her Lord meant when He said, 'My kingdom is not of this world,' and what His gospel is as a message of eternal life to men. She must guard against herself lest she be betrayed from within, against the society round her lest she yield to its appeal to lower her ideals, and against the State itself lest she be found worshipping the Devil for the sake of the kingdoms of the world. She must witness to the world as the prophets and apostles did, warning men of the ultimate meaning and the issues of life. 'She is a prophet to whom has been given "the Word of the Lord," one whose business it is to act as a constant critic of the world's doings, a critic who knows neither fear nor favour, and is quite prepared to be thrown with Jeremiah into a pit or with Pastor Niemöller into a concentration camp. . . . When it is claimed for Christianity that it holds the solution of the world's problems, the claim must not be taken to mean that the Church can tell the various States how they should adjust their tariffs, apportion raw materials, or regulate prices. It means that these problems, and a thousand others, can only be solved in a Christian world, a world of converted men and women. It means that these problems cannot be solved at all until the first problem is solved, the problem of human life.'

In his remarkable book, *The Work of Jesus in Christian Thought*, the Rev. Alexander M'CREA devotes himself near the end to a general summary of the results attained in his inquiry. One of the first facts to be borne in mind, he says, is the nature of Christ's mission, which was to set up in human hearts the kingly rule of God. This is a moral kingdom where moral values are everything, and there must be a moral constitution in man fit to receive this kingdom. These seem the postulates of redemption. Jesus accepted the reign of God in Himself; and this fact guarantees that ethical

or offence, but when used of Christ's work it makes assumptions about God and His relation to sinners that are untrue. It assumes that God was unwilling to approach sinners until His anger was satisfied by the penal sufferings of some one, and here New Testament teaching is forsaken for a revived paganism.

'Substitution' is the third word which has thrust itself into Christian thought, carrying a load of alien ideas with it. Grotius was largely responsible for this. He understood Dutch law better than he understood the gospel. According to him God was Judge in a law court. Sinners must be punished, but that punishment can be borne by proxy. All the guilt of mankind can concentrate on the innocent Person of Christ. Punishment must be visited on some one, and He, as man's substitute can bear it. This is at once the most immoral and perilous theory that has found its way into popular theology. Nothing more need be said of it.

But there is another term that requires explanation. Phrases such as 'the blood of Jesus cleanseth us from all sin' and 'loosed from our sins by his blood' are difficult to modern ears. Alike in Roman Catholic tradition and in crude Protestant evangelism they have had distressing results. In order to understand this expression it must be remembered that the New Testament writers were nearly all Jews who regarded the blood as the life and the life as in the blood. We should not go astray if in reading allusions to 'the blood of Christ' we substituted the word 'life.' This is the meaning in 1 Jn 1⁷. Christ's blood indicates His entire sacrifice of Himself on our behalf. The word is symbolic of an outpoured life.

If none of the words referred to, as popularly understood, embody the truth, they still point to something that is real. It is true that the reconciliation Christ came to achieve could not have been realized unless and until every attribute in God's holy nature had found perfect expression and satisfaction. Thus there is a Godward as well

as a manward significance in the life and death of Christ. He tasted death for every man. And this ministry of love He continues in heaven.

We have received two recent publications of The Plough Publishing House, Ashton Keynes, Wilts. This is the publishing house of The Cotswold Bruderhof Community, in which no little interest has been shown both in Britain and in America, and of which the virtual founder was the late Dr. Eberhard ARNOLD, who died in 1935.

Dr. ARNOLD was for many years General Secretary of the Student Christian Movement in Germany. Becoming deeply convinced that the organized forces of religion were failing in their mission, which was to build a community based on complete justice, purity, and peace, he gave up his ordinary forms of work and founded at Sannerz in the year 1920 a Christian Bruderhof, which held all things in common, for Christ's sake. In 1926 the Bruderhof was removed to a lovely situation in the Rhoen hills.

As a visitor records: 'The farm, which was a large one, lay in the crater of an ancient volcano. The farm buildings stood on the cone of the extinct volcano, and round its rim were glorious woods. The whole situation was beautiful in the extreme, though lonely. Here the community had established, in addition to their activities on the land, a publishing house and a wood-turning workshop. During the years before the advent of the Nazis to power they had literally thousands of visitors; for it was one of their principles never to turn any one away; thus they became known all over Europe.'

In 1936 conditions in Germany became so threatening, under the Nazi Government, that a transference was made to the Cotswolds. In Ashton Keynes and Oaksey nearby there is at

present a community of nearly three hundred souls, while a branch of the Bruderhof has been started in Birmingham. It is thought by the leaders of the movement that the practical demonstration of the Bruderhof way of life is urgently needed, not only in Birmingham but in our industrial and distressed areas generally.

As for the Bruderhof way of life, it consists of work done with the hands for the benefit of the group as a whole, the training of children from early infancy to communal ways of living, and the worship of the living Christ, 'not the conventional Christ of sentiment or dogma.' It is felt to have been no accident that the first disciples of Christ formed a communal group, sharing money and property.

What is said above has been gleaned from the Preface by John S. Hoyland, the well-known Quaker, to the first of the recent works to which reference has been made—*The Early Christians* (The Plough Publishing House; 4s. 6d., paper covers 3s.). This volume, printed and published by the Brothers of the Bruderhof Communities, contains only the Introduction to the main part of the German original and those notes, explanations, etc., referring directly to that Introduction. The German original contains, apart from the Introduction, an annotated selection from the documents and writings of the Early Christian Church from the time after the death of the apostles to about the year A.D. 180. It is hoped that a full edition of the whole book, which is said to have become in

Germany a standard work on the Early Christians, will soon be published in English.

The aim of the book, as its author says, is to let the witness given by the age between the Early Church and later Christianity work upon the age in which we live. For the age in which we live requires, it is held, an awakening and a mutual understanding of all who seriously desire to be Christians; and this can only be given, it is further held, on the basis of the earliest Christian witness.

As through this book we may be able to realize how great were the forces of evil against which the early Christians fought so zealously, so through the other book, or booklet rather, to which we referred at the outset, we may be able to realize that the same desperate fight confronts present-day Christians, and that the same necessity lies upon them of zealous championship of the cause of Christ. The title is *God and Anti-God* (1s.), and the author is again Dr. Eberhard ARNOLD.

The Anti-God, who is Mammon, still possesses his ancient subtlety and devilry, but—and this is the faith of the Bruderhof Communities—a new order shall break in upon the world, and God Himself shall take His power and reign. It is not only the hope of the world to come that is cherished by the Bruderhof Communities, it is hope for this world. And the foundation of that hope is the power of God in Christ, who is living to-day, and is even now bringing in upon the earth His new Kingdom.

