

The Spirit of Man's Steady Conquest of Nature

FROM 3YA, recently, a particularly thoughtful address, on the meaning or spirit of man's now frequent conquests of Nature in diverse realms, was given by Mr. E. Hitchcock. The address was based upon incidents in connection with the Southern Cross flight, and we think worth reproduction in full.

WE probably have reason to be thankful for the fact that we cannot realise the full magnitude of events through which we are passing. This is true of any happening of great moment, whether of disaster or triumph. Were it not so some periods of life might be too exacting for human endurance. The Tasman flight has claimed our attention in New Zealand, and particularly in Christchurch. Four men have crossed the Tasman in a period little more than between sunset and sunrise. They landed amid the plaudits and enthusiasm of a great concourse of their fellows. Enthusiasm for their achievement was boundless, but just why it should be so is not readily expressed. Subject as they were to all the ordinary human limitations and needs, the flyers immediately sought rest and sleep.

Later the city accorded them a civic reception. The Chief Magistrate, the Government, the Opposition, a scientist, and a flying officer expressed the representative welcome. The four flyers spoke in reply, and their words were heard throughout New Zealand and Australia.

In their remarks these men modestly belittled their achievements and jollied one another. An unduly emphasised £2000 grant from the Government was quietly put in its proper perspective. Bantering reference was made to the protest from organised religion against their possible arrival on a Sunday. Reverent tribute was paid to the men who, before them, had tried and failed. A fierce contest with elemental nature was described with terse brevity. The heroes were then taken away to a civic dinner.

WERE these doings worthy of the occasion? Is the feeling warranted or unwarranted that the true significance of the event has not been perceived with sufficient clearness? Have not great occasions some significant message for us? Should the apparently care-free lightness of the heroes themselves deter us from thinking around their achievement somewhat more seriously? Should we fear the gibe "Don't fuss or moralise. The men themselves do not hold lofty post-mortems on the flight." This is a subtle sophistry which, if unduly heeded, might easily kill all vision or expression of vision.

This amazing achievement has a significance. It should be sought out, pursued, and perceived. To do so is not the function of the men who flew, and to say so is no reflection upon them. Men of action have ever left for their fellows much food for thought and it is one of the best tributes to heroism and great achievements to seek out their full meaning and strive

to see them in their true relationship to life.

The flyers, the representatives of Government, Opposition and civic authority, the protest of organised religion, and the angry chorus of counter protest, present a picture of exceptional interest.

THE flyers availed themselves of certain human knowledge of Nature's laws. They added human organisation, intuition, and courage, and thereby extended the application of that knowledge to a wider field by a new achievement. The civic authority applauds the achievement, and expresses the pride and admiration of the city, which, as the point of destination, receives added fame. The Government sees the military and commercial possibilities, and expresses Imperial approval and financial appreciation. The Opposition acclaims the achievement, endorses the pronouncements of the Government, but points out that it does not always do so, and thereby uses an occasion of great moment to emphasise its political identity. The scientist perceives all "the patient searching after hidden lore" which has preceded and made possible the perfection of the mechanical instrument of the flight. Emboldened by the past, he looks into a future of unlimited possibilities. The flying man welcomes and applauds the achievements of brother flyers, and sees the possibilities of the development of the machines under controlled and directed administration.

The protest of organised religion, and the vigorous rebukes administered to it, add a perplexing and regrettable touch. This increases the difficulty of rightly apprehending the magnitude of the achievement, and the amazing possibilities it foreshadows.

RELIGIOUS and non-religious people (both terms are loose and indefinite), unreasonably persist in grouping all life as sacred and secular. They are unheeding of the fact that tribute and honour and worship are paid to unseen power in an infinite variety of ways, by an infinite diversity of human creatures. These men whom we honour, recognised that they had to overcome certain limiting laws of nature by the application, embodied in their plane, of certain other laws of nature. Knowledge of these latter has been won by the persistent sustained effort of the human mind by faith, and by achievements as daring as that of these airmen. Their faith in these laws, and the powers behind them, was no mere formal acquiescence in a creed. They staked their lives on their belief, and that is a high degree of tribute, if not of worship. The laws of physics, chemistry, and mechanics, upon which the aeroplane is based, are confidently believed to be as inexorable as the law of

gravity which it appears to overcome. These men "saw wonders over the deep," not only in the elemental and relentless forces of Nature which menaced them so alarmingly, but equally in the relentless but controlled and directed forces which enable them to triumph.

So viewed, the flight is not a secular achievement, threatening to trespass on sacred traditions or practices, but is nothing short of sacramental in the faith to which it gave expression, and in the operation of the powers which did not fail that faith.

That the human instruments, through whom these powers operated, do not themselves acclaim this view, need not perturb us. Continually everywhere, human agents are being used by a power that they neither identify nor acknowledge, in terms of our limited accepted form of recognition. In this, as in other cases, shall not their faith be accounted unto them.

IT does not follow that the recognition and observance of a particular day is suggested as out of date, or of no avail. The failure to perceive, or the difficulty in perceiving, the sacred and sublime in such an achievement as this flight, indicates how much we need the help and encouragement of such a day—some specific time allotted to an endeavour to understand this "great scheme of things entire." The mistake appears to lie, not in advising people to recognise a day of some special moral and spiritual import, but in limiting the spiritual to that day and its observances.

In our modern social organisation, the observance of a precise day is violated at every turn. The whole community is dependent upon services which involve regular Sunday work. As life becomes more complex, the observance of simple rules as a means of giving expression to moral principles, becomes less practicable. At the same time, moral and spiritual laws must find expression in some kind of outward and visible observance. The outward form is not without value, but the inward principle is of greater value. Of equal value is it to perceive that the desire to defend what is believed to be right, is vital to all human life and progress. This desire gave rise to the protest. It crossed a popular interest, and required courage. The flyers, greatly daring in a high endeavour, appeared to conflict with the

principle enshrined in our Sunday observance; but the courage that achieved, and the courage that defended a principle, are not unrelated, and certainly less in conflict than might appear.

THE airmen, the administrators, the clergy, the scientists, are actuated by motives and are carried on by faith. If any one, more than another, should be able to perceive the divine in all spheres of life, it should be the representatives of organised religion. Might we not look to them, not only to uphold those outward observations which express inward principle, but also to direct us in recognising the divine in every new application of science, every new triumph of Nature's laws directed and controlled, against Nature's laws elemental and uncontrolled, and in all the affairs of man.

"Not by Sabbaths alone, not by science alone, not by bread alone, shall man live." "Not the narrow pane of one poor creed can catch the radiant rays that shine from countless sources."

THE Tasman crossing, in completing a triumphant trans-Pacific flight, opens up possibilities imperial, commercial, and military, of a significance difficult to realise. None of these is greater, and perhaps none less realised, than the possibility of still more light on the relation between God and Man and Nature. Science alone without the spiritual qualities of faith and courage, could not have achieved such a triumph. More and more man is being entrusted with divine power. More and more forces natural, and forces spiritual are being related and associated. Every fresh step in man's mastery of nature unknown, by nature understood and applied, is evidence of a royal power. By whatsoever name we name the object of our allegiance, may we not, at each new evidence of such power, confidently and triumphantly exclaim:—

"Behold your King!"

THE upheaval in the distribution of wavelengths and power allotments is to come November 11. The eastern United States is most affected, but the Federal Commission has certainly cut a wide swath out on the coast too. New log books are going to be in order and Dx'ers will have the fun of finding their favourites all over again.

Mullard
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