

COLONIAL TITLES.

To the reader of history nothing can seem stranger than the use of titles of chivalry as the prizes of aldermanic or colonial ambition. Chivalry contributed a permanent as well as an ennobling and refining element to human character. But the institution itself belongs, with all its associations, to a remote and irrevocable past. If we had heard that Mr. Cartwright, as a tribute to financial eminence, and a number of other gentlemen in acknowledgment of their high position, had been solemnly invested by the representative of Her Majesty with one of those tails which the Evolutionists tell us adorned the bodies of our primeval ancestors, the announcement would scarcely have seemed to us funnier than that of their reception into the knightly fraternity of St. Michael and St. George.

The very conjunction of the names, St. Michael and St. George, carries our minds back into the night of the fabling middle ages. St. Michael, the overthrower of the Dragon, was the chief of the chivalry of heaven, while the mediæval mythology, mingling perhaps in this case, as it did in many other cases, with the mythology of paganism, made him also the patron deity of hill tops and peaks, such as the remarkable mounts which bear his name on the coasts of Normandy and Cornwall. St. George was the chief of the chivalry of earth; and a very earthly chief he was, supposing Gibbon to be right in identifying him with the infamous George of Cappadocia. If he was not that worthy, transmuted by the wonder-working influences of religious party, and subsequently by the wild play of crusading fancy into a military saint, nobody can tell who he was. Roman Catholic hagiology is compelled to say that his saintly deeds are better known to Heaven than to man. He belongs, at any rate, emphatically to mediæval fable. It is to be hoped that Sir Richard Cartwright duly pays his orisons to his two patron saints, and he will never forget to invoke them before he lays his lance in rest to tilt at Sir S. L. Tilley's budget. George of Cappadocia, in truth, was, after his fashion, rather distinguished in finance.

In the mist of the early Middle Ages it is impossible to trace the exact history of institutions. The growth of feudalism itself is matter less of record than of conjecture. There can, however, be little doubt as to the origin of knighthood. In all military tribes, as were those of the Celts and Germans, the youth, on arriving at manhood, was received into the fraternity of the warriors with some special rites and after a certain novitiate. Feudalism fastened upon this custom, and, in accordance with its general tendencies, transferred the power of initiating from the tribe to the lord. The Church also laid her hand on it, invested it with a religious character, and made it a dedication of the young warrior's prowess to the service of religion, the redress of wrong and the relief of the oppressed; thereby consecrating and tempering that military spirit, the excess of which was the source of barbarism; as she did, in the same age, by the institutions of the Truce of God. But knighthood still remained an imitation into a warrior's life, and a sort of military baptism, or rather the taking of a Christian soldier's vow; a thing as far removed as possible in its nature from the piece of tinsel which is nowadays bestowed by ministers, laughing in their sleeves, on elderly and often gouty aspirants to social rank.

"The ceremony of admission to knighthood," says M. Martin, "was grave and austere. On the eve of the day of admission the young squire took a bath in sign of purification; then he was dressed in a white tunic, a crimson mantle and a black surcoat, symbolical colours, which indicated that he was pledged to lead a life of chastity, to shed his blood for the faith, and to have always present to his mind the thought of death. The candidate fasted till the evening, and spent the night in prayer in a church or in the castle chapel; then, in the morning, he cleansed his soul by confession, as he had purified his body by the bath, heard mass, and presented himself at the holy table. The mass ended, the candidate knelt before the sponsor who was to confer the order on him, and who briefly recalled to him the duties of the warrior, 'Every knight is bound to keep the law of honour (*droiture et loyauté*), he is bound to protect the poor, that the rich may not oppress them, and to succour the weak that the powerful may do them no despite. He is bound to keep himself clear of all treason and injustice. He is bound to fast every Friday, hear mass every day, and make an offering at it if he has the wherewithal. It is the duty of knights to keep faith inviolably with everyone, but above all with their companions in arms, to love each other, to honour each other, and assist each other on every occasion' [as do Sir Richard Cartwright and Sir Charles Tupper]. The candidate took the oath; then were brought to him all the pieces of armour which he was about to receive the right of wearing; when he had been clad with the coat of mail, girt with the sword, and had the golden spurs bound upon his feet, his sponsor in chivalry gave him a blow on the cheek (by way of fixing the event in his memory) and three strokes with the flat of his sword on the neck, and said, 'In the name of God, of St. Michael (or St. Michael and St. George) and of Our Lady, I dub thee knight.' The bells sent forth a merry peal, the church rang with the sound of the trumpets; a helmet was brought to the young knight, and a war-horse was led up to him; he put spurs to his charger, and making his lance glitter in the sun and brandishing his sword, he traversed

at full speed the courts of the castle and the green meadows which stretched beneath its ramparts, while the shouts of the people hailed his admission into the brotherhood of chivalry."

Time does wonders in the way of transformation. It has converted the name of the high priest of Roman Paganism into that of the pretended head of the Christian Church; it has degraded the title of the chief military officer of a feudal kingdom into that of the village constable. But it has never performed a stranger piece of legerdemain than in putting into the place of the young and warlike candidate for knighthood, the ceremony of whose admission we have just seen described, a palsy and wheezy old gentleman who with difficulty kneels down to receive the ironical accolade, and rising with still greater difficulty, hobbles home, tripped up at every other step by the sword between his legs, to tell his wife that she is My Lady.

It is of course possible to trace the gradual transition. A change in the character of knighthood was taking place during the decadence of the Middle Ages, when the Garter, the French Order of the Star, the Golden Fleece, and other Court orders were founded. To this period mainly belong the fantastical and Quixotic extravagances which have exposed chivalry to merited ridicule; for chivalry in the period of the Crusades was at least serious, and had a real and important work to do in the world. It is in the French wars of Edward III. that we find a number of young candidates for knightly honours setting out on the campaign with a bandage over one eye, in fulfilment of a vow not to see with both eyes till they had performed some feat of arms in honour of their mistresses. The companions of John the Second's Order of the Star they were who were bound by the Statutes of the Order never to fall back more than a certain distance in battle—a regulation which exposed them to extermination by soldiers of a more practical stamp at Poitiers. No Templar or Hospitaller, no knight of that age, would have been guilty of any such nonsense.

Still the Garter was a real order of knighthood. Entrance into it was obtained by feats of military prowess, and among the original members were soldiers of fortune who had no title to admission but their valour. Nesle Loring, for example, was a young squire, apparently of low degree, who had distinguished himself at the battle of Sluys. The head of the order, Edward III., was himself not a lay figure draped with ineffable millinery, but, of all the gallant and adventurous brotherhood of knights which he had formed, the foremost in war except his renowned son. The companions of the Round Table at Windsor, the heroes of Crecy and Poitiers are now represented by a train of elderly gentlemen, selected most on account of their birth and their acres, arrayed, on high occasions, not in helmets and hauberks, but in purple velvet cloaks and white satin tights, and who, if set in battle array upon the field of glory would hardly be able to stand against the charge of a stout fish-wife. An old peer is said to have avowed that his motive for craving for the Garter was that it was now the only thing in England that was not given by merit. If the illustrious dead could hear, the explanation would have been gratifying to the Black Prince.

* * * * *

How much good chivalry did for humanity it is hard to say, because we really know but little about the state of society in the early Middle Ages, especially about the state of those classes which were most liable to oppression, and stood most in need of protecting influence. But that it did good can hardly be doubted. It at all events gave birth to an ideal of character greatly superior not only to that of warlike barbarism, but to that of military antiquity; and if within the pale of Christendom its operation, as an elevating and humanizing influence, was mainly confined to the members of a privileged class, and altogether narrow and imperfect, it saved by its devoted valour all Christendom, and civilization at the same time, from the conquering hosts of Islam with slavery, polygamy, concubinage, fatalism, and despotism in their train. No one can look upon the sepulchral effigies of its religious warriors without paying them, across the estranging gulf of centuries, the homage of the heart. Its spirit has gone forth into the noble enterprise, the self-sacrificing beneficence, the gentle courtesy, the pure affection of modern life. Its dead forms are degraded to the uses of a social vanity which profanes the memory of Sir Galahad and Bayard.

Between social rank and official rank there is all the difference in the world. Social rank is a gratification of vanity in the particularly bad form of exclusiveness. It is an object of natural ambition to the vulgar wealth of which—mingled like tares with much commercial eminence of the nobler kind—there has recently been a rank growth in England, and which is to a great extent the parent of Jingoism as well as of this increased craving for titles and tinsel of every description. It is the great bribe which political corruption now has to hold out to millionaires of the grosser sort, who, with all their wealth, are uneasy about their social position in an aristocratic community. It is also the natural object of adoration to the shoddy class of Americans, who are too justly said to outvie in demeanour, when they get into the presence of European rank, all their rival devotees in Europe. In this sense the love of titles is, as special pretenders to practical wisdom are always telling us, part of human nature, like any other mean tendency, on which intriguing politicians may play, but which it is the mission of advancing morality to banish. Otherwise social rank, sup-