

CHRISTIAN BELIEF. By Alec R. Vidler. (S.C.M. Press; 10s. 6d.)

This course of lectures delivered at Cambridge is an exposition of the basic Christian doctrines as 'an interpretation of our existence and experience in this bewildering universe'. *Bewildering* is perhaps here the operative word; Dr Vidler's conclusions appear tentative almost to the point of reverent agnosticism. 'No interpretation', he says, 'no faith, no system of belief, is demonstrable. The most that a wise man claims for the basic convictions by which he lives is that they make more sense of all the facts with which we have to reckon than any alternative set of convictions.' 'Theology is not at present in a position to throw its weight about, and it makes itself ridiculous when it says, as an English Roman Catholic bishop said a year or two ago, "We have the assurance of our position. We have the certainty of the possession of truth. We have the answers to all the questions".' The author's own standpoint is nearer to that of Bishop Lightfoot, 'I find that my faith suffers nothing by leaving a thousand questions open, so long as I am convinced on two or three main lines'. Dr Vidler's chief conviction—apart from which he is prepared to 'leave a thousand questions open'—concerns 'the reality of the living God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. . . .; and that conviction, brought to a point, means staking everything on the finality of Jesus Christ, the Word of God made flesh, the Light of the world'.

Here indeed are the fundamentals of Christianity, but how sure can a man's grip be even on these truths without an accompanying conviction as to the reality of a teaching Church? Dr Vidler has much that is both true and illuminating to say about the Church as he conceives it—viz., as 'the whole congregation of Christian people dispersed throughout the whole world'—but so vague and generalised a notion hardly does justice to the much more definite ecclesiology of the New Testament. The book makes its most effective appeal (and much of it is extremely effective) in such chapters as 'The Work of Christ', 'The Holy Spirit' and 'The Forgiveness of Sins'; for it is when dealing with these congenial themes, rather than with the 'institutional' elements in Christianity, that the author is most at home.

A.G.

THE RITES OF EASTERN CHRISTENDOM. By Archdale A. King. (Burns Oates, 2 vols.; £2 2s.)

The awakened interest in the Eastern Churches, so earnestly desired by the Holy See and influencing powerfully so many departments of Catholic life, has brought into being many new publications, ranging from pamphlets designed to bring home to schoolboys the fact that Photius is not the name of a flower to treatises whose footnotes lay

bare the innermost recesses of the great libraries of Europe. It is difficult to place the work under review in its proper position between the two extremes. The expert, wishing to verify some fact, may or may not find what he wants, while the beginner who, after standing through a Ukrainian Liturgy in his parish church, wants to know why the Pope allows this sort of thing, might have difficulty in finding out the answer and be forced to go away content with the information that the tradition which points to Mount Ararat in Armenia as the place where the Ark came to rest is unknown to the fifth century writer Moses of Khoren.

But even if some topics do seem to be dealt with rather summarily and others treated with rather too much detail for a general work (e.g. the origin of the word 'Coptic'), the two volumes are a mine of fascinating information for those who take an interest in the subject. Such tit-bits thrown out at random as that John of Monte Corvino translated part of the Mass into Tartar, or the Venerable Bede's distaste for Greeks (as shown by his comments on Theodore of Tarsus) make one clamour for further information. In its full description of the various rites, with many extracts in excellent translation, this work is most useful and is an excellent investment for any centre of Christian learning. The introductory chapter of Volume I should be read by every educated Catholic. 'Catholic Faith as expressed in the Eastern Liturgies' is a valuable section, though one would hesitate to say that transubstantiation, as distinct from belief in the Real Presence in some mysterious way, 'is clearly admitted in all the Rites'.

The mass of historical, philological and archæological information requires some previous knowledge of the subject in order that a proper sense of proportion may be maintained. To those possessed of such knowledge the book will be valuable.

R.B.

THE LITERARY IMPACT OF THE AUTHORISED VERSION. By C. S. Lewis.
(The Athlone Press; 2s.)

'There is no possibility of considering the literary impact of the Authorised Version apart from that of the Bible in general'. Mr Lewis is suspicious of the 'Bible as literature' and the 'aesthetic approach'; it is too authoritatively sacred a book to be so approached. So while he believes that as a canon of thought and behaviour the Bible has exerted an influence on English letters, he cannot find sufficient evidence to support the belief in the 'literary' influence of the Authorised Version to any remarkable extent. Without sharing Mr Lewis' gloomy views on the future of the Bible (which depends on views about the future of religious belief) one must welcome this deflation of a popular superstition.