

Pretoria News

THE CAPITAL'S OWN PAPER.

No. 547.

[Registered at G.P.O. as a Newspaper] MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 10, 1928.

PRICE TWOPENCE

FACING THE MORAL FACTS.

A REMARKABLE SERMON.

WHAT PRETORIA LEARNED FROM THE OXFORD GROUP.

In the presence of a crowded congregation, the Rev. E. Macmillan spoke in St. Andrew's Church last night on "What we have learned from the Oxford Group." The Oxford Group is the party of young University men who were in Pretoria recently, meeting University students, school-boys, and others, and talking to them on personal religion.

"In all my experience as a minister," declared Mr. Macmillan in a remarkable address, "I have never known anything quite like the quickness with which the interest of young people was caught and aroused by the visit of the Oxford Group."

A MORAL ISSUE.

There was no artificially-created sense of expectation to account for this eagerness to hear their message. Mr. Macmillan added. On purpose, their meetings were not advertised; their qualifications were not boosted; their bare credentials were not even furnished. When they first arrived in the country—it was at Port Elizabeth, about six weeks ago—no one was even aware of their existence. And, though they lived in a camp eight miles out, at Schoemacher's Kop, yet within a fortnight all the boys of the Grey School and most of the youth of the town had directly or indirectly come under their influence. In the School, especially, they were able to work under favourable conditions—to arrange groups and to have talk with individuals. They saw individually every boy in the School. Mr. Lang, in a letter I received last week, writes of the permanence of the effect on the work of boys who never had been workers in any sense. And their work to-day, he says, is better than it was four weeks ago, when the effect might have been expected to be most marked. Then, he says, as regards the Boarding House, the prefects assure him that quite naturally the sort of talk that used to go on has disappeared. It has surprised everybody—even those who have had to do with boys most of their lives. Mr. Lang describes the results on the older boys as "bewildering," and yet there was no emotional disturbance at all. The greatest things have been happening in the depths, fundamental changes, without the show of an emotional ripple on the surface.

The Meaning.

What is the meaning of it all? The only explanation is that these men have had an experience of religion—a most real, vital, practical experience of religion—so emancipating that it has set them free to share it. And they were so manifestly glad about it themselves, and they could speak about it in such a natural way, with such freedom, sincerity, gaiety and whole-hearted joy, that everybody was made to feel that such a religion is a glorious possession, that it must make life infinitely worthwhile, more full of fun and friendship and high spirits than was ever thought possible. Their message was their best advertisement; it carried with it its own credentials. One had only to hear them or to meet them to realise that they had hold of something we hadn't got, or once had and lost. L. P. Jacks speaks of "the lost radiance of the Christian religion"—that's just what they have found: the radiance of the first days of Christianity and radiantly they are able to speak of it.

No Emotionalism.

I have heard in my time religious testimonies which were highly embarrassing to listen to, and you felt that that sort of excited mood could not last very long. But as you listened to these men telling how their lives were changed, you were not in the least embarrassed by the obvious joy the experience gave them; it was so free from excitement or emotionalism, of that or of any kind; though, of course, there was the deepest quality of emotion in their message, as there is and must be in any message that comes from the

heart and is addressed to the heart. But it was the quiet joy and settled kind of satisfaction that one has when he has made the greatest throw of his life and has staked all he has in the making of it.

There was not much said of what it cost them to win this priceless treasure, though everyone was made to feel that it had cost them everything, everything that had hitherto blinded them and bound them to the snaring charm of life and to the pleasure of sin. For who ever said that sin had no pleasures? Every one of us knows what pleasant things sins are, so long as we are blinded and bound by them, so long as we are the servants of our desires. Well, all that and many things besides, less flagrant, perhaps, but none the less binding and hindering, had to go in order to make the great acquisition. And when once it was made, there never was a shadow of regret that so much that was pleasant had to be given up; on the contrary, they were so happy and satisfied with their bargain that they said nothing much about the cost to them. But to us who were still not wholly free, holding on to things that were dear but not good for us, refusing to make the great surrender, they had to tell the only terms on which we could have what they had; they had to tell us what the cost would be to us, lest we should be looking for a bargain counter, so to speak, where we could get it cheap. But they told us quite frankly that there is none such. If we really want it—if we really and with all our hearts want our purity, sense of well-being, and peace, our health and happiness of mind, restored to us—we can have it, if we are prepared to face the issue and meet the cost.

Clearing the Ground.

To begin with, Mr. Macmillan proceeded, the issue is a moral one, and until it is faced nothing can happen. This has been their experience without exception; and, we may add, it has been ours. But we were afraid to face it in ourselves, and therefore in others. I was taking you for granted and you were taking me for granted—and now we see that until the moral issue has been met and settled we can take nothing and nobody for granted. We must "clear the ground."

We are self-deceived, exclaimed Mr. Macmillan; we don't know the truth about ourselves—and we don't want to. We are afraid to face it, for we have an instinct of what it will mean. We know it will mean bringing out into the open every wrong relationship, every false and wicked temper, every impure desire or habit—and that will mean, inevitably, pain and humiliation, not only to ourselves but possibly to others; if they are concerned innocently or culpably in our wrong. Yes, to clear the ground will mean all that and more; and it is that which some of you are not willing to face, because you are not ready to pay the price. And yet, believe me, for I am telling you now what happened to myself, the moment you decide to clear the moral ground, to bring out into the open anything that has an injurious effect on your life, the moment you confess it, not only to your-

(Continued on next column).

self and to God, but to the one or more whom it may concern — or if it only affects yourself, to someone on whom you can trust for sympathy — in that moment the moral ground is cleared and you are free to meet with God and claim His guidance. It works infallibly — I had almost said automatically.

Fellowship.

Mr. Macmillan went on to tell of the release that came to his own spirit, and continued:—This, then, is the second thing we learned from these men—that, in order to share the moral faults or difficulties of others, we must be free from them ourselves—free in the sense of having faced them honestly and whole-heartedly.

The third thing we have learned from the Oxford Group, he continued, was how to make real the life of fellowship. It is what men and women are craving most for to-day—witness the rise of all sorts of clubs and societies, from the Rotary Club to the Younger Set! But none of these can give what the fellowship of those whose lives are changed, and who are out to change the lives of others, can give. And I think these men of the Oxford group have shown us how to recapture the genius of fellowship—to find the art of living and working together. As Loudon G. Hamilton, the leader of the Group that came out here, but who through illness was unable to come north — as he said — "It is not enough to manage to 'get on' together. We must learn the secret of real fellowship. And the price of it is absolute and continued honesty, first with ourselves and then with other people. We must be willing to share not only our time, our homes, our money; but to take down the mask and to reveal the moral and spiritual struggles of the inward spirit to which we are or have been subject."

Equal Terms for All.

Now, I've tried to tell you the whole truth as I have come to know it in my own experience, Mr. Macmillan said in conclusion. I'm not suggesting that your experience must be the same as mine, not at all; but only that the conditions, the terms of having the experience, must be the same for everyone. And don't imagine that I'm claiming anything like perfection. "I am in a sense only beginning. I speak not as though I had already attained or were made perfect, but I follow after—forgetting the things behind, reaching forward to the things in front," looking to Jesus, who is the perfection of all I am trying to be. Temptations will still come to me, but I will deal with them on the threshold. They will never more, God helping me, get

inside the living room of my mind. Hasty words of anger or impatience or uncharity will arise to my lips, but I shall bite my tongue before they are uttered . . . And I am sharing all this with you in order that you may be helped to clear the moral ground of your own life, and join up in this great adventure. And every day is now full of romance and adventure to me, because it is full of surprises of good, not of evil. I see the good in other people, not the bad. I see the real joy and fun that life can hold for all of us, notwithstanding our disappointments, sorrows, and troubles; and the world itself is a much more beautiful place because it is God's world and because I am all out to make it the world He meant it to be. And I want, above all things, to help you to join with me in this great adventure. I used to be afraid of death. Now I am not even afraid of life.