

# Revival of World Proportions Predicted From Oxford Group

## Movement First Known as Buchmanism, Then as 1st Century Christian Fellowship, Employs New Technique and Interests Different 'Prospects'

By Stanley High

For ten days at Briarcliff Manor, not far from New York City, a revival meeting has been under way. Briarcliff Manor—an "upper class" hostelry—has none of the conventional trappings for a revival. Those who participated—you could find most of them in "Who's Who" or "The Social Register"—had none of the marks of the conventional revivalists. What took place lacked all the technique of conventional revivalism—for one thing there was too much gaiety about it and too little emotional debauch. But despite these things, or more likely because of them, the 400 guests—American, Canadian, British, South African—left on Thursday convinced that their "movement" had grown out of the period of its immaturity and was on the way to lead in a revival of world-sweeping proportions. There is some evidence that they may be right.

The movement, itself, has been variously named. In its early days, it was simply "Buchmanism," after its leader, Dr. Frank N. D. Buchman. And "Buchmanism" it still is to those who dislike either it or its founder and believe that almost anything can be discredited if described as an "ism." Officially, however, the movement grew out of that designation a number of years ago and into "The First Century Christian Fellowship"—an apt description since its aim was and is to recapture some of the vitality that characterized Christianity in the early period of its history. More recently, that name has been abandoned for "The Oxford Group"—which is not particularly contagious, as names go, but which at least gives recognition of the place out of which the movement gained its first great momentum and establishes a contact with that other Oxford group which was presided over by John Wesley and led, in the eighteenth century, to the Wesleyan revival.

### Influence Not To Be Denied

Whatever its name, there is no denying its influence. General Jan Christian Smuts, the grand old man of South African politics, declared recently that if the impact of the group continued for another three years in South Africa as it had in the last four, there would be no race problem in the Union. The same opinion was expressed by Max Yergen, perhaps the most important South African Negro leader.

Prime Minister Bennett of Canada—who saw the group in action a few weeks ago in Canada, declared that "as Wesley saved England from a revolution, so the forces that the group so powerfully represents are the only ones to save civilization." In fact, it is doubtful if any development in a generation has so widely put religion on Canada's front pages as this series of group meetings in Toronto. I have a whole packet of newspaper clippings. Among them are editorials from the leading papers of the Dominion. One gathers from them that the group must have made a remarkable impression or else that Canada's editorial writers are more susceptible to religion than their professional brethren elsewhere.

"The Oxford Group," declares "The Ottawa Citizen," "believe God's power to be unlimited, able to surmount barriers of race, creed, color or design. The truth of this faith in God is being demonstrated in many lands. As the testimony is borne from duty to city, country to country, as the torch is passed from hand to hand, by individual experience, there is the greatest hope of the world emerging into a better state of human relations. It is perhaps the only hope."

Similar testimony is available from Great Britain. The ecclesiastics who looked upon "Buchmanism," in its early days as some strange, new thing—and therefore probably undesirable—have come to indorse it with a unanimity that cuts across denominational divisions and theological disagreements. "The group movement," says "The Christian World," "is fast becoming one of the deepest religious influences of all times."

### Begun by Lutheran Minister

Now "Buchmanism," as I have said, began with Frank N. D. Buchman. Frank Buchman is an ordained Lutheran minister, just turned fifty. He is, however, professionally ministerial in nothing save his degrees. One might pick him out as a business man, he dresses that way, or a doctor. He has the eyes of a diagnostician, or per-

haps a professor. He doesn't say very much, but what he says is in the classroom, rather than the pulpit manner.

Buchman's own "revival" dates back to 1908. He had founded, in Philadelphia, the first Lutheran hospice for poor boys. A difference with the trustees led to his resignation. He went abroad, nursing his bitterness. At a religious meeting in Keswick, England, he had a "heart-warming" experience something akin to that of John Wesley at the service in Aldersgate Street. The next day he mailed six letters of apology to the six trustees and at the top of each he wrote:

When I survey the wondrous Cross,  
On which the Prince of Glory died,  
My richest gain I count but loss,  
And pour contempt on all my pride.

He never heard from the six men. But he had evidently found something which made it certain that a good many men were to hear from him. From then on through the war Buchman devoted himself, in America and the Far East, to personal evangelism and out of his one-man campaigns the methods grew which, in turn, gave birth to the movement.

### Technique Revolves About Five Words

The whole technique of Buchman and the group revolves around the use of five words: Confidence, confession, conviction, conversion, continuance. The first, in brief, is friendship. The second—an important and much debated point—involves a frank, some say a too frank, interchange of personal self-appraisals. The third calls for a recognition of one's shortcomings, in short, of sin. "Sin," says Buchman, "is anything that keeps one from God or from another person." The fourth involves a surrender of the individual's will and purposes to those of God. The fifth requires activity: devotional and social.

This last item, continuance, is particularly important. A good deal is said at a meet of the group about "guidance." One of the familiar phenomena of such a meeting is the little "guidance notebook," in which members of the group during "quiet times" write down the specific things to which or away from which God has directed them. Most frequently, as I have observed, this guidance involves some other person. Those in the group are missionaries of a new sort, salesmen without high pressure. I have not observed that they embarrass their prospects, but I have noticed that they do not let go of them.

I am familiar with the drive for souls of the ordinary revival. There is nothing of that mass technique about the group. "Prospects" are not handled in quantity. They are separated from their fellows and reached on a man-to-man basis. And the whole process has in it nothing of the theological gloom, the "weeping and gnashing of teeth" or the hell fire and brimstone prospect that is often a mark of revivalism. In fact, the hardest thing for many people to understand about the group is the gaiety of its members. That, I suppose, accounts for some of the opposition to it. It is assumed that anything which has so much joy-can hardly have much religion.

Another source of opposition is the wholly new terminology. I have read of letters from disturbed people who are against the group because none of the oldtime evangelical phrases appear in its discussions. And, on the other hand, a good many other observers refused to take the movement seriously because, so they say, "it has nothing new in it."

Obviously, however, it has something new. At least it seems to be reaching a lot of "new" people. At Briarcliff Manor this week devotions on several days were led by Russell A. Firestone, son of the rubber manufacturer; testimonies were offered by members of the New York Stock Exchange, by a retired professor of international law at Princeton, by one of the nation's leading social service workers and a long list of other prominent Americans. Religion for a long time has known how to have revivals on the Bowery. It is something new if it has discovered how to have a revival on Park Avenue.

The next year will see group house parties in every section of America; in Britain and South Africa. All this activity, of course, may not lead to the long hoped for revival, but it is certain to put religion in the papers and into the thoughts of many hitherto not notably religious people. And that is no small achievement.